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The Washington Monthly

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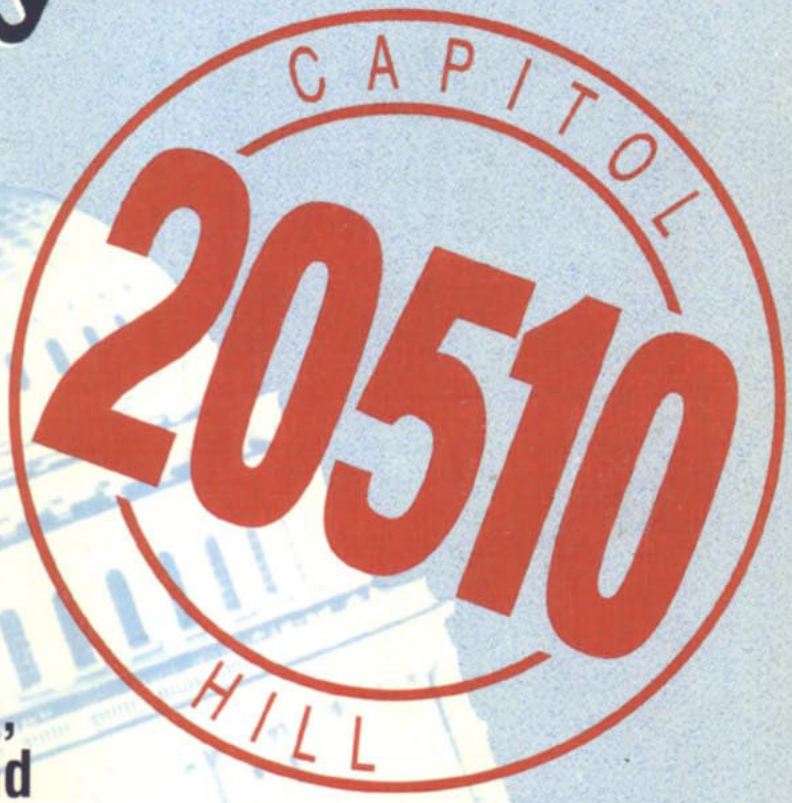

Giving good quote, stealing credit, and other tricks for turning any congressman into a media star

by Christopher Georges and Katherine Boo

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An Essay by
CHARLES TAYLOR
With commentary by
AMY GUTMANN, Editor
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The Washington Monthly

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LETTERS

Megalopolimaniac

Katherine Boo's "Wolves in Cheap Clothing" [July/August] in many ways exemplifies the style and substance that makes *The Washington Monthly* great. It did, however, make me feel a bit as though I had read an account of a distant foreign land, and the cause is obvious. Like too many essays that hinge on identifying cultural trends, Boo's article never ventures out of a slender geographic and demographic sliver of Manhattan (most articles about Big Trends attempt at least a pretense of balance by examining Beverly Hills as well). In a way, Boo's decision to focus on the Big Apple was a wise one, since she would have found little to support her theories elsewhere.

To the vast majority of Milwaukee residents, "downscaling" is an obscure fashion of which we are but dimly aware and certainly not to the extent that we feel compelled to adjust our lifestyles. It's safe to say you'll find concurrence among the populace of Tacoma, Lubbock, or, for that matter, Queens. Sure, T-shirts may currently outnumber polos, but, generally speaking, most of America's bistro-to-diner ratio has remained constant. The point is simply that many changes that rock the Lower West Side pass unnoted in the rest of the country.

I mention this because Boo uses her Gothamocentric observations in support of her speculations on impending sociological change in the United States. It is quite impossible for most of us to achieve the intended level of giddiness or dread about these changes when their harbingers exist, so far as we can see, only in a magazine. As a rule, the only people who take seriously the caprices of Manhattan socialites are Manhattan socialites. I hope the *Monthly* is not planning to add its name to that ignominious list.

WILLIAM L. MEYER
Brookfield, Wisconsin

Court disappointments

You should hire the Ross Perot detective agency to check out your contributor Tony Mauro ["High Stakes, Low Courts," July/August]. I suspect he is a secret agent of the Bush reelection campaign. Why else would he end a coherent piece of left-wing advocacy with such a boneheaded recommendation—that Democrats should campaign openly for left-wing court decisions? Murderers, Mexican torture-doctors, drug dealers, and aggressive homeless people do not win many votes. What slogan would Tony Mauro suggest for this Democratic campaign—"One, two, many Willie Hortons"?

HUGO S. CUNNINGHAM
Somerville, Massachusetts

I read with interest Mauro's article. It certainly confirmed for me what I had suspected all along, that the Reagan and Bush administrations have been stacking the lower federal courts with inept judges who tend to be closet Brown Shirts.

What surprises me, however, is that you actually printed the article, or at least printed it without jeers. After all, what Mauro describes belies one of your oft-mentioned objectives—that a significant proportion of government employees should be political appointees. You've often written to the effect that one way to make an elected official's policy work is to enable that official to appoint the bureaucrats who will carry out the policy. Well, here we see that with a vengeance. Reagan and Bush will be responsible for the erosion of liberty and personal freedom in this country—and they will have done it using your prescription: appoint like-minded people whose loyalty is to the political extremes of their masters, not to the principles of the Founding Fathers, the Constitution, or the country as a whole.

Having now had a fair chance to see the true result of your principle in action, would you care to reconsider?

FRED FACHET
Warrenville, Illinois

I noted with interest your comment in "Tilting at Windmills" [September 1992] deploring the inability of talented civil servants to rise to the top of their departments and agencies. Somehow I sense this view is not entirely consistent with your vigorous championing over the years of opening more federal positions to patronage appointments.

ALAN K. CAMPBELL
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Mr. Campbell is the former chairman of the U.S. Civil Service Commission.

The editors reply:

The Reagan-Bush court appointments illustrate the danger of having the wrong administration make tenured appointments. If the people understand the harm that can be done by such appointments, whether to the judiciary or to the civil service, they will be more likely to vote with care. And this will achieve one of our aims, which is to have a more concerned and participating electorate.

Our other aim is to have a more accountable bureaucracy, which can be achieved by turning roughly half of the positions currently under civil service into two-and-a-half year appointments, renewable up to 10 years. This would guarantee a steady infusion of new blood that would, because there is no seduction of tenure, tend to be bolder and more risk-taking than the present incumbents. The appointees would certainly be more accountable, because they could be fired if they didn't perform well.

But note that we would leave half the jobs under civil service because this has the advantage of providing continuity. A desire for continuity would also lead us to increase the number of civil servants at the top levels of government—at the White House and in the offices of cabinet and

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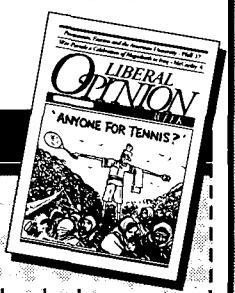

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agency heads—where they have been virtually nonexistent. The problem with the current arrangement is that, as administrations have changed, a deplorable loss of institutional memory has occurred: One set of politicians leaves to be replaced by another that is often shockingly ignorant of the lessons of the past.

Health feud

Charles Peters' June "Tilting at Windmills" reports that "all federal employees are eligible for generous health insurance programs." I take issue with "generous." Writing such a comment in the context of "official perks" for White House staff and congressmen is disingenuous.

Career federal employees pay, on average, 60 percent of their total health insurance premiums and have few dental and optical benefits; many co-pay on provider services. Judged by the prevailing private sector standards, or by similar benefit programs offered by most state and local government employers, this is hardly "generous."

Also, situating your comment in the context of the need for national health care is hardly fair. However legitimate the need to support a national health program, it is not served by degrading federal employees, whose health benefits are not a perk but part of their salary. I resent being lumped with "perked" congressmen. No fair.

May I suggest that your "generous" insinuation, although serving a noble purpose (i.e., national health care), is reportorially careless and violates your own standards of candor and truthfulness.

RICHARD S. TYKSINSKI
Buffalo, New York

The editors reply:

See "Share the Health" by Stephanie Mencimer on page 11.

Fish and chicks

In his review of Martin Anderson's *Imposters in the Temple* [Political Booknotes, July/August], Stanley Fish comments that John Ruskin was "one of the more notorious pedophiles of his time.

Ruskin was many things: a great critic, an extraordinary draughtsman and watercolorist, a bit of a crank, a confirmed prude. One thing he was not, however, was a pedophile, notorious or otherwise. In fact, as Professor Fish surely knows, Ruskin's sexual life was notable chiefly for its sad uneventfulness.

Fish finds Anderson's use of Ruskin's observation that the "essence of lying is in deception, not in words" ironic. Fish's intervention only compounds the irony.

ROGER KIMBALL
New York, New York

The author replies:

Webster's defines pedophilia as a condition in which children are the preferred sexual object. Ruskin became infatuated with Rose La Touche when she was 10 and he 37. In the years following their meeting he attached himself to her family, travelled with the young girl, and wrote her long, anguished love letters. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* reports that "in middle and old age he made many young girls the object of his affection." He would visit them, romp with them, and tell them of his devotion to Rose. He did not engage in sexual relations with them (he was, by all accounts, impotent), and it is this fact that leads Kimball to insist that he was not a pedophile. It has long been known, however, that pedophiles tend not to enact their fantasies but instead maneuver themselves into the positions of voyeur and distant admirer. There can be little doubt of Ruskin's proclivities as surveyed by a recent biographer, Wolfgang Kemp, who concludes by assigning him "to the ranks of 'nympholectics,' the lovers of little girls." One might want to debate whether nympholectic or pedophiliac should be the preferred term, but my point, with respect to Anderson's book, remains the same: John Ruskin is a curious choice of authority for someone inveighing against adults whose erotic objects are young children.

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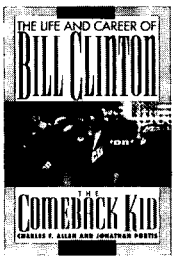

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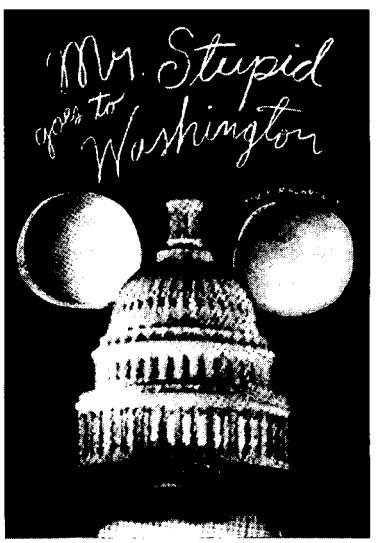

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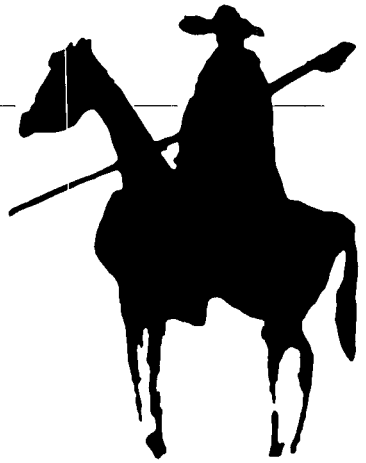

Why is the sensible Canadian health plan unlikely to be adopted here? One reason is that the medical and insurance industries are buying up Congress. By midsummer they had already contributed $10 million to House and Senate candidates. Just three influential congressmen—Dan Rostenkowski, Richard Gephardt, and Henry Waxman—got around $150,000 each. . . .

News accounts of the recent trial of the CIA's Clair George have inadvertently brought to light two of the government's most enduring problems. In one story that appeared in *The New York Times*, George Cave, a witness, was described as "the only official of the agency who was fluent in Persian." Iran has had such an important position—either as ally or foe—in American foreign policy for the past 40 years that this is a genuinely frightening statement, even to those of us who have long been unsure of the linguistic competence of the CIA.

Another story about the George trial in *The Washington Post* reported that "throughout the trial, George expressed genuine indignation over having been indicted for doing what he, and the agency, had always done." The charge, of course, was lying to Congress. As the *Post* explained, agency officials had become accustomed to, if not actually lying, telling Congress only as much as they wanted to tell, using cleverly crafted responses to avoid saying more.

Unfortunately, language problems also exist at other government agencies. Linguistic skills among the State Department's foreign service officers remain embarrassingly modest despite many articles about the problem in this and other publications. At the time of the takeover of our embassy in Tehran in 1979, only one in 10 of the foreign service officers stationed there were even minimally competent in Persian. Of the 30 Americans serving in our consulate in Bombay in 1990, only one spoke the language well enough to do more than take a taxi across town.

As for misleading Congress, there is widespread feeling in the executive branch that evasion and lily-gilding are justified to protect the interests of one's agency, whether it is the CIA or HUD. . . .

In recent decades, cigarette smoking has been as accepted in the Far East as eating rice. So it's no small accomplishment that Taiwan recently embarked on a campaign to discourage smoking among its youth. Yet this praiseworthy effort is being opposed by—guess who—the American government, in the person of Carla Hills, the U.S. Trade Representative who is fighting to keep the world free for Phillip Morris.

One way the cigarette companies encourage the young to smoke is by paying the movie producers to use their cigarette brands in films that attract youthful audiences. Beer companies use the same tactic. In fact, the Center for Science in the Public Interest recently got ahold of a Miller Brewing Company videotape that bragged about the company's success in getting its products shown in movies such as *Ghostbusters* and *Beverly Hills Cop*. Music videos are also used to reach what the Miller tape (prepared solely for use within the company) describes as "the all-important entry-level drinker."

Caught *in flagrante*, the Beer Institute reacted by claiming that while beer advertising expenditures have increased 50 percent in the last 20 years, per capita consumption has stayed the same.

What's really going on is that alcohol consumption among older adults has been steadily declining—the same is true of cigarette smoking—so that the beer and tobacco companies are fighting to stay even. They are succeeding by attracting new customers through advertising and "product placement" in movies and on MTV. What better market than those who are too young to know better or young enough to feel like they're going to live forever. . . .

As veteran readers of this magazine know, we don't accept advertisements that glamorize

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smoking or drinking. We believe that such advertising should be outlawed.

We also think that an advertising prohibition is an essential companion to our even more controversial position in favor of legalizing drugs. The big mistake we made when we abolished prohibition in the thirties is that we permitted drinking to be glamorized in the media.

We favor legalization of drugs, not because we think it will decrease consumption, but because it will decrease crime. If the best economic opportunity for poor youth is selling illegal drugs, they're going to seize that opportunity even if it means jail. (Did you read about the study that showed the *majority* of young Baltimore blacks were somewhere between arrest and parole in the criminal justice system?)

There is no jobs program that our government can offer today that has a realistic probability of even coming close to the income offered by the drug trade. If drugs are legalized, the big money will be taken out of the trade, and drug-peddling crime will end. Of course, the problem of addiction won't end, but we can minimize it by prohibiting advertising and devoting to treatment programs even half the money we spend today on the incarceration of drug criminals so that addicts who want to shake their habit will not be denied treatment as they now often are.

There is no question that people do terrible things under the influence of illegal drugs. But they also do terrible things under the influence of a legal drug, alcohol. And they do more of these terrible things while drunk than while stoned, because alcohol is now the drug of choice among the young men who cause most of the violent and accidental (vehicular) homicides in America today. Thus the wisest drug to prohibit is alcohol. Only we tried that, didn't we? And it didn't work. So why do we persist in applying the same failed policy to other drugs that we don't like. . . .

Speaking of the tobacco industry, it has long been admired, even by those of us who oppose it, for the cleverness of its lobbying tactics and its all-around skill at getting legislators to vote its way. But the lobby's latest triumph—getting a smokers' rights bill passed by the California assembly by one vote—plowed new ground. The decisive vote was cast by legislator Dick Floyd, who was not in the chamber at the time. Who pushed the button on Floyd's desk? Has the Tobacco Institute enlisted a higher power? . . .

God may have been innocent in this case—there is reason to suspect the long arm of a pro-tobacco legislator at an adjoining desk—but I have to tell you that I've been worried about Him lately. It seems as if He has joined Ronald Reagan and George Bush in the great conspiracy against the working classes. For instance, His Hurricane Andrew hit, not Palm Beach, but Homestead and Florida City, which are largely inhabited by the very groups whose income has suffered the most from the tax and economic policies of the last 12 years.

One reason the working class has been so terribly screwed is that it doesn't stand up for itself. In fact, no one wants to admit to being a member. Once, on a television show, I pointed out that the lower middle and the working classes were supplying most of the soldiers and sailors who were risking death in the Gulf war. A nice woman called up to say her husband was in the military and she resented being called lower middle class. I told her my own income put me squarely in that group, but she would not be comforted. Can we find another term for this group? The problem with not recognizing its existence is that you then lump its members together with people earning $75,000 to $200,000 a year—as Bill Clinton does—into the grand group called the middle class. The danger is that benefits that should go to the bottom half will be wasted on the more affluent. . . .

How are American business executives reacting to the news stories about their generous salaries? Are they saying, "We should take a cut?" Not exactly. Instead, they are telling the sources of those stories—the compensation consultants—to shut up. And the consultants are complying, according to a recent story in *The New York Times*. The reason for the consultants' silence is, of course, that they depend on

Timothy J. Adams, who died on September 6, was the *Monthly*'s first managing editor. He brought to his role here an impeccable sense of style. And in a world in which far too many people find it far too easy to bend with the wind, his integrity was never compromised. I am grateful that he was my friend for more than 30 years.

—C.P.

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the good will of the executives for their business. According to the *Times*, the two leaders of the effort to silence the consultants are John S. Reed, the chairman of Citicorp, and H. Brewster Atwater Jr., chairman of General Mills. . . .

What counts the most: that Bill Clinton as a very young man evaded the draft in a dubious war, or that George Bush as a president in his sixties evades taxes by claiming legal residence in Texas to avoid paying Maine or the District of Columbia the taxes he should pay on his only possibly legitimate residences? . . .

The main thing to remember during the next month is that while there is a lot wrong with Bill Clinton, there is a lot more wrong with George Bush. Most troubling is Bush's indifference to domestic issues. Clinton's life shows that he really cares about the economic, health, and educational problems that must be faced by the next administration. Bush is bored by these problems as was dramatically demonstrated during the first four years of his presidency. . . .

There is, however, one stand Bush has taken with which I sympathize: his proposal for a 5 percent reduction in the salaries of federal employees making more than $75,000. Of course, Bush himself was one of the culprits in the executive pay raise, but that doesn't make his new proposal wrong. I suspect that few voters know that more than a handful of government employees are so well paid. Actually, about 65,000 of them make $75,000 or more and 11,000 make more than $100,000. . . .

In September, Howard Kurtz, *The Washington Post*'s fine media critic, proved how influential he is by writing an article headlined "Republicans and Some Journalists Say Media Tend to Boost Clinton, Bash Bush." His point was immediately adopted by the TV pundits, and in the following days a visible anti-Clinton tint colored a good many campaign stories.

The trouble with the *Post* article was that the first authority cited was Brit Hume, who told Kurtz that "some reporters are smitten with Clinton. There are things written about Bill Clinton and Al Gore that I've never seen written even by opinion reporters. I think there's been a double standard."

Kurtz identified Hume simply as ABC's White House correspondent. Since the next person quoted by Kurtz was identified as a "liberal activist," it seems that Hume ought to have been identified as the cheerleader on the White House press corps who was among those most responsible for the media's pro-Bush tilt in the first three years of the administration—a fact that deserves consideration in understanding the anti-Bush tilt that occurred this year.

The press has a tendency to lean toward a president in his early honeymoon years, and to shift away from him when he gets in trouble. The president and other administration officials are valuable sources that reporters don't want to offend—until, and this is the crucial point, it appears probable that the incumbent president will lose the election and the stories about what the administration is doing wrong are richer than the stories administration sources can give the press. The late Drew Pearson put it this way: "We will give immunity to a very good source as long as the information he offers us is better than what we have on him." . . .

One result of Bush-Reagan economic policies is that the percentage of students at the 25 most selective colleges and universities who came from families with incomes of at least $100,000 a year is rising and now stands at 37 percent. The catch is that only 5 percent of American families make $100,000 a year. . . .

Another example of Bush-Reagan injustice: According to the Congressional Budget Office, the richest 20 percent of families got *more* than 100 percent of the increase in average family income during the eighties. Mathematically impossible, you say? Because the bottom 40 percent actually lost ground, it *is* possible.

And how about this study by the Tax Research Project at the University of Missouri. Under Reagan and Bush the tax burden of a couple making $15,000 a year has risen by almost a third, but the tax burden for a couple with a $150,000 income has fallen by about a third. . . .

I've been remiss in not keeping you up to date about taxpayer-subsidized conferences, conventions, and travel opportunities. There's still time for Ohio lawyers to make the Continuing Legal Education (CLE) seminar in St. Thomas in December. ("If you have to spend three hours in class, why not spend the other 21 in the American Paradise?") And members of the Young Lawyer's Section of the Louisiana Bar can still get "15 hours of CLE credit . . . including 1.2 hours of ethics credit" at the Hyatt Regency on Grand Cayman Island in November. I'm sorry to report that Missouri lawyers who didn't find out about it on their own have already missed their Mid-Year Seminar in Santa Fe.

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And I hate to have to tell the morticians that they missed the National Funeral Directors Association winter seminar, where, according to the organization's publication, *The Director*, "One hundred and five funeral directors, family, and friends enjoyed the plentiful powder at Steamboat Springs in the beautiful Colorado Rockies." I especially admire the chutzpah of the one to two hours of "ethics" credit. What exactly are the ethics involved in cheating the taxpayer? . . .

If you're from Pennsylvania, I can't give you a travel tip but I can advise you on what to do at the polls in November: Vote against Arlen Specter. See Christopher Georges and Katherine Boo's article on page 36 for some of the reasons. But the worst act of Specter's political career was trying to pin a perjury rap on Anita Hill a year ago without a shred of justification. He had tried to trap her into committing perjury. She was smart enough to see the trap and avoid it. This made him so angry that he made the false charge against her anyway. Contemptible. . . .

What does it say about the United States Senate when Specter and Alan Simpson, whose behavior at the Hill hearings—"I have in my pocket . . ."—was as bad as Specter's, are both highly respected by their colleagues. . . .

The person reporters should watch with high skepticism during this campaign is James Baker. Manipulating the press is his specialty—no one in the Reagan-Bush era has done it better. I would not be at all surprised if, by the time these words are published, he has succeeded in conning the press into either uncritical or only quietly critical acceptance of a debate format and schedule favorable to Bush. Even if he fails with his debate hustle, reporters should remain alert to the danger of writing the stories he wants them to write. He's a crafty fellow. . . .

It's frightening how the cable television industry has flooded its channels with advertising and comment that represents only its own side of a bill before Congress that affects its interests, and not even made the tiniest effort to show any other views. Even the sports announcers have been turned into propagandists. What's happened to fairness? Is the FCC sound asleep? . . .

Speaking of fairness, I think that most fair-minded people have been willing to forgive Bill Clinton for trying to avoid military service in Vietnam. My guess is that he hasn't been willing to forgive himself. I think that's why questions about his draft history continue to trip him up long after he should have learned the danger of answering them in a misleading way.

There are, I suspect, three reasons for Clinton's guilt. One is the haunting knowledge, so memorably described in the pages of this magazine by James Fallows in 1975, that an underprivileged boy was sent to serve and possibly die in his place. Another reason, one less rational but deeply rooted in the male psyche, is that he had evaded a test of manhood. Related, and to me more reasonable, is the sense, extremely important to men like Clinton who have aspired to leadership positions since their grade school days, that war tests how a young leader will perform in the clutch. Bill Clinton grew up hearing the story of Jack Kennedy's heroism in the South Pacific and he must have wondered: Would I have the brains and courage and determination to come through a crisis and figure a way to get my men out of such a mess alive? Etched in Clinton's mind must have been, as it was in mine and so many others who knew the story, the picture of Kennedy, after the Japanese destroyer had plowed through his PT boat, assembling his men in enemy waters in the dark and swimming to a nearby island, towing, with a line gripped between his teeth, a badly burned sailor. Kennedy later managed to extricate his crew and himself from behind enemy lines. The Bill Clintons of this world must wonder if they would have passed such a test, and if they will later come through in another clutch, more important for their country and the world, as Jack Kennedy did in the Cuban Missile Crisis.

This is strong stuff. With guilt like this, you don't answer questions with the ease and confident self assurance that is so important for a presidential candidate to project. This is why I hope Clinton will forgive himself before it's too late.

I speak to him not as a morally superior World War II combat veteran like George Bush, but as one who, while he served in that war, was injured in training before facing the test of combat. What I ultimately learned, after years of Clinton-like guilt, was that what counted was not what I failed to do in the past but what I chose to do in the present. So, to Bill Clinton, I would say what counts is the courage you show today. Stop being nervous about your failures in 1969 and focus on coming through in the critical final months of this campaign. What the people most want to know is that you are pulled together inside. And you only make them worry when you give them evasive answers. . . .

—*Charles Peters*

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WHO'S WHO

It may not be true that **Jennifer Fitzgerald** and **George Bush** slept together at the American Embassy in Switzerland, but during Fitzgerald's tenure as an aide to the then-vice president, she accompanied him on almost all of his foreign trips. Her role: "gift coordinator." She was also said to have spent a great deal of time shopping during the trips, a proclivity that subsequently may have led to the purchase of the furs that she attempted to smuggle into the United States while serving in her current role as deputy chief of protocol. . . .

As for another alleged illicit romance in the family values administration, **Margaret Tutwiler** has once more switched jobs in order to accompany **James Baker** back to the White House. Observers will be watching to see if she and Baker continue to request adjoining rooms during the campaign, as they did in 1988 when Mrs. Baker was not traveling with her husband. . . .

Whatever Tutwiler's personal relationship with Baker, insiders agree that her influence on him is generally good, tending to humanize the policies of a man not known for his warmth. Unfortunately, she often fails, as she did in her effort to get the administration to support the Chinese idealists in Tiananmen Square, and more recently in her concern about the bloodshed in the former Yugoslavia. One State Department official described her as "a bleeding-heart liberal who hates to hear of people being blown up." . . .

Those who think the administration is sincere in its devotion to family values point to the case of **Robert Mosbacher**'s family, which has remained loyal to daughter **Diane** even though she is an open lesbian. Cynics, however, note that Mosbacher continues to condemn homosexuality in others. That seems to be consistent with **Bush** and **Quayle**'s willingness to embrace a granddaughter or daughter who has had an abortion even though they condemn abortion for everyone else. . . .

Cynics also argue that the administration's family values crusade has helped distract it from what is really wrong with the government. What, for instance, was the Federal Emergency Management Agency doing when it should have been learning the lessons of Hurricane Hugo so that they could be applied to the next big disaster, which turned out to be Hurricane Andrew? Under the leadership of **John Sununu**'s protégé, **Wallace Stickney**, FEMA's major preoccupation in the year preceding Andrew was a witchhunt against homosexuals. . . .

Everyone knows about **Quayle**'s potatoe, but did you know that a letter from **Marilyn Quayle** sent out in August to 200,000 Bush-Quayle volunteers contained three spelling errors? . . .

Nigel Hamilton has uncovered a treasure trove of new material for a forthcoming biography of **John Kennedy**, the first volume of which will appear next month: several hundred letters from Kennedy to his closest friend, **Lem Billings**. Among the revelations is that **Joseph Kennedy** bribed **Arthur Krock**, *The New York Times* Washington bureau chief and columnist, to give the family favorable publicity. He also tried to bribe **Franklin Roosevelt**'s press secretary, **Steve Early**.

Hamilton's book is detailed enough in its account of John Kennedy's sex life to be an almost certain bestseller. The star attraction is **Inga Arvad**, the beautiful Danish newswoman whose activities in the United States were closely followed by the FBI because of her previous friendships with **Adolf Hitler**, **Hermann Goering**, and **Josef Goebbels**. The bureau's interest led to a wiretap of her conversations with Kennedy, transcripts of which Hamilton has managed to obtain. Kennedy's first marriage proposal, interestingly, was not to Arvad, or to **Jacqueline Bouvier**, for that matter. It was to **Frances Ann Cannon**, a North Carolina Protestant who turned Kennedy down because her parents didn't want her to marry a Catholic. Cannon eventually married writer **John Hersey**. . . .

Many of **Bill Clinton**'s supporters were thrown for a loop when he once more gave a misleading answer to new questions raised about his draft experience by the *Los Angeles Times*. Another person who looked bad in this episode was **Betsey Wright**, the Defender of the Clinton Record, who is supposed to have the facts ready to answer any dangerous allegations about the candidate. She had to admit that, even though she had been told about the recent allegation—that a Naval Reserve position had been arranged for Clinton by his uncle, which resulted in another delay in his induction—months before it was reported in the *Times*, she had not bothered to search Navy records or even interview the man who made the allegations. Wright didn't help her reputation when a few days later she finally took on the Republican charge that Clinton raised taxes 128 times as governor of Arkansas. The correct number, she noted righteously, was 127. . . .

—*Susan Threadgill*

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Share the Health

Why hasn't the Washington establishment done anything about the health care crisis? Follow us inside the comfy world of presidential and congressional health care. . . .

by Stephanie Mencimer

Until recently, when you thought of Oregonians you probably envisioned Birkenstock-shod tree huggers earnestly sorting plastic from paper in the nation's recycling capital. But if you've tuned in to the nightly news lately, you may have a slightly different image—one of hospitals and doctors and sick people. Legions of reporters have besieged Oregon in the past few months trying to get a look at one of the country's first broad-based efforts to resuscitate an ailing health care delivery system.

For the past five years, as Congress and the White House noodled around on health care reform, Oregon grappled with all the tough issues—cost, access, quality—and came up with a plan to make primary health care available to all the state's residents, regardless of income. Other state legislatures, from Hawaii to Florida to Minnesota, have made moves as well, providing subsidized and even free health care to the working poor. And with all the heat they're now taking from the Bush administration and health care industry representatives, you'd be excused for forgetting that they're an exceptional breed of politician: ones getting knocked for actually *doing* something about health care.

So how is it that a few states have the guts to tackle the issue while the Bush administration ducks and Congress covers? Is it Oregon's bracing air? Minnesota's clear water? Or is it that the politicians who make up those legislatures are still real people—people who don't have to read policy tomes to see that America's health care system is in crisis.

Oregon's legislators, for instance, meet once every two years; they're police officers, farmers, electricians, housewives, union bosses, small business owners, real estate agents, and professors who spend the majority of their

Stephanie Mencimer is a Washington writer.

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time in their own communities working regular jobs with regular people. Unlike Bush and members of Congress, who enjoy an extensive network of low-cost medical benefits and perks, Oregon legislators don't need Pennsylvania Senator Harris Wofford to tell them that people are worried sick about health care. Most of the year, they see it firsthand.

Maybe it's asking too much to wish that every U.S. congressman could experience America's health crisis as directly as the average electrician sees it. But a trek through the cushy health care empire of Washington politicians should chill the average Joe's ticker. Few lines, minimal costs, a galaxy of options, and guaranteed coverage make the federal government and Capitol Hill just about the only places in America where health care *isn't* in crisis. And it also makes one wonder whether the real explanation behind Washington's failure to act on health care isn't a matter of insurance industry PACs or pleas from small business or the other usual suspects, but a product of plain old insulation. Of course, the point isn't that congressmen and other officials should be denied adequate health care. It's that the rest of America should be afforded it, too.

Executive privilege

Even the plushest hospital couldn't be mistaken for a Ritz-Carlton with catheters; hospitals can be miserable places. But some are less miserable than others, especially when you're North Carolina Rep. Bill Hefner. Last June, when Hefner arrived at Walter Reed Army Medical Center for bypass surgery, there were no suspicious inspections of his insurance card, no long waits in cold rooms full of screaming kids. Instead, he was greeted by an orderly who helped him check in and then escorted him to the Eisenhower Executive Nursing unit. This is a high-security, extra-private VIP wing that sports a stereo (circa 1956) compliments of John Foster Dulles and is decorated with artwork donated by Jackie Onassis and the Eisenhowers. Hefner spent nearly a week and a half being tended by Walter Reed's elite cadre of cardiologists before going under the knife. After surgery, he was afforded eight days to recuperate.

Had Hefner been a private citizen and undergone the same surgery at George Washington University med center, a private hospital a few miles away, the charges would have mounted fast. The actual surgery would have been $8,000, and he would have been charged $2,789 for each day he spent in intensive care and $1,000 a day for a regular room, for a grand total of about $40,000. But as a member of Congress, Hefner paid nothing for his medical care. The only bill he received for his stay was for the room and food (at a relatively cheap $701 daily rate)—the entire sum of which was promptly picked up by his Blue Cross health insurance, provided through the federal government.

Granted, most people with decent health insurance would probably have their bypasses at least partially covered, too. But then again, they might not. Medical costs have risen so steeply that insurance companies now resort to all sorts of creative ways to pinch pennies, such as delaying claim payments, limiting the amounts they pay for some treatments, and subjecting consumers to long waiting periods before they are eligible for coverage. Excluding preexisting conditions from coverage is almost standard. So it should come as little surprise that, according to a recent study, almost half the patients who were unable to pay their hospital bills actually had insurance but their policies simply wouldn't cover their treatments.

And then, of course, there are the 37 million people who have no health insurance.

Rep. Hefner surely had plenty to worry about while in the hospital, but unlike many other Americans, one worry wasn't potential bankruptcy. Perhaps that's why, when you call Hefner's office to find out his position on health care reform, you're told that he doesn't have one. "He hasn't settled on his view of what should be done," explains a staffer.

Not that it's fair to single out Hefner. Every day, thousands of Washington policymakers—members of Congress, the Cabinet, the White House staff—receive similarly user-friendly medical treatment through the federal insurance plan that the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) negotiates for 9 million federal employees. Under the plan, employees pay, on average, 28 percent of the premium (which works out to $100 a month); the government pays the rest. The plan is so good it's often considered a model for national health care that includes the private insurance industry.

It's grand that federal employees are so well taken care of, but compare their plan with what the rest of us face. The federal government gives employees the option of several private insurance plans, all of which provide mental health care, substance abuse treatment, and some dental benefits, while regular folks are often at the mercy of a single insurer, chosen by their employer. If federal employees are unhappy with the plan they choose, they can try another one during "open season," once a year, without risking loss of coverage, because OPM makes sure that none of the plans exclude preexisting conditions. The vast majority of us never have this luxury. When John McGann, an employee at H&H Music Co. of Houston, developed AIDS, his company switched insurers

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and presented him with a policy that capped his benefits at $5,000. He spent the last few years of his life on Medicaid. A member of Congress, on the other hand, could develop AIDS and cancer and become an alcoholic simultaneously and his policy wouldn't flinch.

For congressmen, good insurance is only the beginning. Members also have at their disposal a wide range of supplementary medical services—from free outpatient use of top-flight military medical facilities to the Capitol clinic and on-site private pharmacy. Got a sore throat, Senator Hatch? Think you have a fever, Speaker Foley? Just walk down the hall, see the nurse, and say "ahh." Need a checkup, Rep. Gingrich? Prostate acting up again, Rep. Bateman? The attending physician will send you over to the Naval med center pronto. In fact, he'll make the appointment himself, and an orderly will meet you at the front desk to make sure you don't have to linger with hoi polloi waiting in line.

No wonder it took until last year, when Wofford won his Senate seat in a Pennsylvania special election by stressing the need for universal health care, for congressional policymakers to realize, at least momentarily, that the issue is a serious source of anxiety for many Americans. In Wofford's wake, they flooded the Hill with 79 different health care bills. But the flurry of paperwork and fiery speeches has resulted in little more than the public illusion that Congress is addressing the issue. Not one of these 79 bills has a prayer of passing this year.

Of course, members will quickly note that they are not as personally insulated from the crisis as they used to be. Since the House bank scandal, a few medical perks have been curtailed. For instance, senators now pay $520 a year to use the office of the attending physician, rather than billing the taxpayer. But on the House side, they're still doing it the old-fashioned way: We pay for it. And when members say that they now shell out for the prescriptions they have received free for years, what they really mean is that they pay 25 percent of the bill for drugs—the cost that their insurance won't cover.

Congressional distance from the health frustrations of ordinary Americans becomes jarringly clear when members start to speechify about it. For example, those who have opposed adopting a single-payer system like the Canadian model by arguing that we would have long lines to see a doctor apparently haven't tried making an appointment in our system lately. At George Washington University's health maintenance organization (HMO), for instance, it takes three weeks for a woman to get an appointment to see a physician's assistant to get a refill of birth control pills. And she'd better bring something thick

Has the pen become mightier than the vote?

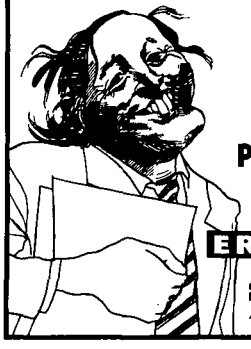
Nobody elected them, but political pundits like George Will, John McLaughlin, Robert Novak, and William Safire wield immense power. They can define issues, make and break reputations, change presidential priorities, even lead the country to war. But are they truly independent thinkers, or slaves of Beltway cronyism? In *Sound and Fury* Eric Alterman questions the credentials of today's wise men, and suggests that their disproportionate influence is a sign and cause of America's political decline.

"The best book yet on the insider culture of Washington where public officials and elite pundits produce the mumbo-jumbo that passes for democratic dialogue."
—Bill Moyers

SOUND & FURY

The Washington Punditocracy and the Collapse of American Politics

ERIC ALTERMAN



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to read when that day arrives. Even routine appointments can take two hours.

Need to see a full-fledged gynecologist? Take two Midol and see him in two months.

Credit canard

Of course, it's not just the routine annoyances that our representatives are insured against; it's the extraordinary indignities as well. Consider the case of Helen Sanders, a 74-year-old woman in Largo, Florida, who saw a doctor at her Humana HMO in January 1991, when she started losing control of her facial muscles for hours at a time. Her doctors believed that an artery in her neck was 80 percent blocked—a level of blockage that could prompt a stroke at any time.

While a series of crucial yet expensive tests were recommended, Sanders couldn't get Humana to approve payment for them. She camped out in the clinic every day for weeks trying to shame the staff into approving the tests. Four months after Sanders' initial diagnosis, a clerk at the clinic told her that her file had been lost and that her doctor was on vacation, so she couldn't get the tests anyway. Skeptical, Sanders went home and called the clinic that day without using her name and was told her doctor was in the office seeing another patient.

It wasn't until the state insurance commissioner in Tallahassee aggressively intervened that Sanders got served by Humana. But by that time, her doctors concluded that she had a 99 percent blockage of the left carotid artery. She could have had a stroke while sitting in the waiting room. Sanders had surgery that day.

Could a Canadian-style system be much worse?

George Bush thinks so, and the GOP convention joke about "the efficiency of the House bank and the compassion of the KGB" pretty much sums up the nuances in his argument against nationalized health care. And come to think of it, it's not too surprising that compassion and efficiency are highly prized by the big man: His own health plan—government-provided, of course—offers them in spades. In addition to a private ambulance and a room at Bethesda Naval Medical Center kept ready and waiting just for him, the president has his own personal physician, Dr. Burton Lee III, zealously devoted to monitoring every presidential burp and wheeze. Think Bush was perplexed by those electronic supermarket scanners? Imagine how mystified he'd be by the clerks demanding credit histories from bleeding patients in an inner-city emergency room.

It's not just Bush whose health care comes hermetically sealed. Lee's medical unit cares for all the health emergencies of the White House staff and Cabinet members. While it doesn't offer regular checkups (Bush gets those free at Bethesda), the office does work as a referral service, so if Louis Sullivan (or any of his friends, for that matter) starts having chest pains, Dr. Lee will see to it that he gets proper attention.

"We'll make sure you get into the best location at the best price," Lee says. "I generally make the phone calls myself, call the doctors myself, make the arrangements myself."

That George Bush's doctor makes Marcus Welby seem heartless is good in one respect: It reminds us that there are still compassionate physicians out there. But the White House's enjoyment of such solicitous service may be one reason Bush's solution to the health care crisis, like many other free-marketeers', is a few milquetoasty tax credits, which do little to address some of the basic health-care problems of less pampered patients.

Bush has favored giving tax credits to people too wealthy to qualify for Medicaid but too poor to afford insurance as a way of providing universal coverage without adopting the "socialist" Canadian system. While a tax credit may seem an appealing small government approach, his administration seems to grossly underestimate the size of the credit many uninsured Americans would need to pay for insurance. So you're a diabetic who can find coverage for her preexisting condition only under a plan with a $5,000 deductible—the $1,000 tax credit being bandied around by Republicans isn't exactly a great

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deal. To cover many of the people who can't afford health insurance, Congress may have to extend tax credits for premiums that are larger than some of the recipients' annual incomes.

Michael Jones, a former loan officer for a real estate finance firm, showed the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee at a June hearing that paying out more in health care costs than you take in as income is a real possibility. Jones has been disabled by a rare neuromuscular disease and is no longer able to work. Knowing his condition, Jones purchased catastrophic health insurance in 1982 while he was still working, at which time the premium was about $2,300 a year for unlimited benefits. By 1991, he was forced to drop the policy because the premiums would have cost *$17,000* a year—substantially more than the Supplemental Social Security Income he lives on.

Prostate acting up again, Rep. Bateman? The attending physician will send you over to the Naval med center pronto. An orderly will meet you at the front desk to make sure you don't have to linger with hoi polloi waiting in line.

A root problem tax credits don't address is the fact that health care costs continue to skyrocket. By the year 2000, the average family will have seen a greater than 400 percent increase in health care bills since 1980. Business payments for health insurance will have increased sevenfold in the same period. But since those figures are as familiar as they are daunting, one might wonder why the press and other Washington powerbrokers haven't worked up a full head of steam; why editorials, placards, and banners demanding *Storm the barricades! Health care reform now!* aren't as ubiquitous as Mao posters used to be in China. Well, it may be because those guys aren't exactly waiting in line at Medic-24, either.

While management at the 14th Street McDonald's in downtown Washington, D.C., doesn't even offer medical benefits to most employees, reporters and editors at *The Washington Post* can choose from an array of policies, none of which exclude preexisting conditions. A paltry $2.50 a week buys them generous dental, optical, and mental health care benefits in addition to gold-plated coverage for maternity and hospitalization.

The Washington elite, and increasingly only the elite, tends to have excellent and expensive health coverage, paid for by its generous employers. And that's one reason that, at Georgetown dinner parties, the capital gains tax is a far hotter topic than health care. Storm the barricades? What's the hurry?

Fixing American health care will demand a full flexing of qualities that seem lately to be in short supply outside of Oregon: leadership, cooperation, and the courage to fight the health care PACs and to make hard choices about what we can and cannot afford. It would be nice to think that that kind of political will can be mustered through intense meditation over Heritage Foundation white papers. Unfortunately, the Washington leadership's personal investment has always had a way of sharpening political urgency.

But if you're still determined to believe that the D.C. establishment's comfy personal health care system has nothing to do with the dismal health care prospects the rest of us face, consider one last thing: the force behind Harris Wofford's decision to seize the health care issue—his wife.

Plagued by chronic health problems, she had received expensive care at the University of Pennsylvania, covered by the sturdy federal insurance he got when he was appointed to the Senate to replace John Heinz. If Wofford had lost the election—which for a while looked like a real possibility—he had more than just his political career to worry about. He had to face the possibility that he wouldn't be able to get health coverage as a private citizen because of his wife's condition. Sure, PAC money talks, but sick husbands and wives and children tend to talk even louder.

Of course, it's not too genteel to wish that Jesse Helms had to lay awake nights worrying that his heart condition could cost him his house, but one can't help imagining the result if he did. If Wofford's brush with America's grim health care reality can put the issue on the table, hundreds of similar brushes might turn the talk into action. Still, maybe there's a kinder, gentler alternative: Imagine enough Washington politicians suddenly stricken with embarrassment about how good they have it that they finally summon up the will to share the health with the rest of us. □

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Reform School Confidential

What we can learn from the failure of three of America's boldest school reforms

by Katherine Boo

When *A Nation at Risk* toppled American educational complacency back in 1983, I was just out of high school, working as a typist for the federal government. Beside me was another just-graduated clerk named Peggy, who had gone to D.C.'s Coolidge High School. Peggy was pleasant and industrious, with a reverence for horror movies. Before long, I realized that she was also functionally illiterate. She had learned to type, slowly but cannily, by matching letters on the page to letters on the keyboard. When she needed to know what something actually *said*, she asked her coworkers to read for her.

One heard a lot of stories like Peggy's back then, as it began to dawn on America how broke the public education system was, especially in the cities and among the poor. There were illiterate honor students, kids who graduated after missing months of school, teachers who couldn't spell competence, let alone demonstrate it. Here in D.C., those stories begat blue-ribbon commissions, tens of millions of dollars in new funding, and perhaps as many new programs as there are schools—from Afrocentric education to early-learning centers to magnet schools. And with each came the expectation that there'd eventually be fewer Peggy stories to tell.

A few weeks back, weary of school officials' talk about how nicely reform efforts were progressing, I started wondering how those reforms had played out at Peggy's alma mater, Coolidge. In 1982, when she graduated, the school's average reading levels were more than two grade levels below the national norm—scores among the worst in a pretty sorry school system. Today, after all the reports

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and research, refinancing and retooling, Coolidge students' reading scores are *exactly* the same as they were. And those are the scores of the slim majority of kids who stayed in school—another statistic frozen in place.

Figures like these, I think, help explain why half of Americans now claim to support educational vouchers. It's not really a profound faith that this country's St. Anthonies and Oxford Preps will cure what ails education. The recent results of the Bush administration's own National Assessment of Educational Progress show that kids about to graduate from private school don't do any better than public school kids when you control for family background. Rather, the polls lay bare our lack of faith in the public schools' willingness and ability to transform—a faith strained to breaking by some of America's most celebrated and ambitious reform efforts.

Rochester, New York. Chelsea, Massachusetts. Chicago, Illinois. In those places in the mid-eighties, some of education's most committed reformers seized upon a few bold ideas, drummed up some cash, and embarked on a seeming revolution from within, generating hype and hope in the process. Rochester's goal was to beef up the quality and status of teachers. Chicago sought to give parents control over the way the schools were run. Chelsea fo-

WHITTLE, DOWN TO SIZE

Everything you really need to know about Chris Whittle sits in downtown Knoxville, Tennessee. There, the media mogul has erected a $55 million headquarters that relentlessly replicates Thomas Jefferson's spread at Charlottesville. With its red-brick arches, wrought-iron gates, and 120-foot clock tower, it's a massive, unexpected building—rich, as Whittle has said, in "energy and youthful spirit."

Big, spirited, and unconventional are precisely what Whittle aims to be, whether the subject is magazines in doctors' offices or, lately, how Americans educate their kids. With his $3.1 billion Edison Project, Whittle plans to build and operate a huge, perhaps revolutionary, network of for-profit schools by 1996.

That's got public-school defenders worried. This, after all, is the man who saved *Esquire* in the early eighties by exploiting untapped advertising possibilities, the guy who invented Channel One for schoolchildren and built himself a media empire before he reached middle age. That glitzy résumé explains why what would be viewed as a doomed venture if proposed by a lesser mortal is being treated as a potential death blow to American public education. Yet what's overlooked in breathless accounts of the Edison Project is that the great innovator often has trouble following through. It is as an inventor—a maker of images and markets—that Whittle has earned his reputation. But behind much-chronicled "successes" like Channel One, there are folded magazines, discarded "poster media," and struggling current publications. Whittle has gone from 42 media properties in 1989 to 26 in 1992, and he just laid off 100 of his 1,100 employees.

What is it with Whittle? Perhaps his self-proclaimed "youthful spirit" is a phrase more telling than he realizes. When it comes to conjuring up moneymaking schemes, he's got as much spunk as a caffeine-wired sophomore. What he doesn't have is the dedication to the details that turns high concept into real change.

Con Edison

It's not surprising that Whittle has only a vague sense of what the classrooms of the Edison Project will look like, what will be taught and how, who the students will be, or—perhaps most important from a businessman's standpoint—how in the world he's going to pay for it. The numbers don't add up: He says he can do it for the current per-pupil cost of $5,500 a year, but that's the barebones cost in schools—public and private—where they already have buildings and desks and books. Hence the widespread speculation that he's expecting the federal government's embrace of vouchers to fuel the project.

But the Edison Project isn't the first time Whittle has ignored the all-important details. Once, years ago, he produced a sports information poster to hang in bars, but in doing so neglected to consider an important fact: Bars are dark. As catchy as the posters may have been, no one could read them and the project, funded by ads, collapsed.

Whittle's real interest is the big gesture, which explains not just his office building but his joy in luring Yale President Benno Schmidt to Edison. In

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cused on leveling the playing field for poor kids. Theirs are still the experiments educators point to when they ask for more time to fix the system. But today, each of them is foundering, leaving communities, students, even the leaders who propelled them disillusioned.

On one level, the stories of these efforts reinforce what many Americans apparently believe: We've tried public school reform. It didn't work. Let's ditch the whole idea. Yet before we start dismantling public education, perhaps we should check out why even these tremendous efforts have failed—explanations rooted, not in money or theory or intention, but in an educational establishment that has managed to thwart the most righteous of reforms.

The greenback attack

In the world according to liberals like Jonathan Kozol, the key to school reform is in the bank: money to hire good teachers, money for innovative programs, money for books, money to relieve students' socioeconomic disadvantages. But it was probably no accident that Kozol, when researching *Savage Inequalities*, didn't spend much time in Rochester. Five years ago, in a school district of 33,000 students—most of them poor and almost half from single-parent

The unmiraculous past of education's latest savior

one blow, Whittle got clout, prestige, and publicity. "[Schmidt] shares our belief that our mission could make a vital difference to our country's future," Whittle exulted. "His joining is confirmation of our goals."

With Whittle, talk of a pending project is always sweeping. Ever since the 44-year-old entrepreneur founded his first company shortly after graduating from the University of Tennessee, he has inaugurated his business ventures with more metaphors than a *New Yorker* short story: Walls are kicked down, new lands conquered, scouts sent ahead. You'd almost forget, listening to his grand promotional lines, that his fortune has been built on producing arcane media for advertisers to reach captive audiences: *Pet Care Report*, for instance, or *La Familia de Hoy*, "a multimedia system in Spanish." And you'd also have to struggle to remember that the talk doesn't always match the result. In a 1989 interview with *The New York Times*, Whittle predicted his revenues would hit $315 million by 1991. He came in at $207 million.

Consider his controversial Channel One, developed to be shown in schools. Introduced in 1989, the daily, 12-minute television program offers a superficial look at current events buttressed by two minutes of ads, usually by corporations like Burger King or Nike, to its captive student audience. Early on, Whittle promised advertisers an audience of 6.6 million teenagers. According to Whittle himself, only 3.8 million actually watch Channel One; the National Education Association says only 2.6 million do. What are the kids getting? A University of Michigan study of Channel One's first year found that watching the MTV-like show increased students' knowledge of current events by a not-so-revolutionary 3.3 percent.

Still, Channel One has survived longer than Whittle's home-state magazine, *Tennessee Illustrated*, founded in 1988. Whittle was executive editor and chairman; the magazine also included a column under his byline and photo, a Whittle Communications first. And its prepublication publicity offered a sense of the kind of hype Whittle would use on endeavors to come: This was going to be big—*really big*. It would reach two million Tennesseans by subscription and distribution—in other words, virtually the state's entire adult population (and, coincidentally, the number of students Whittle says Edison will be serving "shortly after the turn of the century").

Whittle wasn't just market-wise; he was politically savvy. His friend and consultant, Lamar Alexander, had just left the governor's office, so Whittle scooped him up. Alexander—now Bush's secretary of education and a potential source of school vouchers for the Whittle schools—would be a stockholder and adviser not only on the magazine but later on Channel One. (Whittle needed political leverage to lobby Channel One through skeptical legislatures and school boards; he'll need it even more if Edison gets off the ground.) In the case of *Tennessee Illustrated*, Alexander helped Whittle run a minicampaign for the magazine, barnstorming the state and lunching with mayors and power-structure types to sell the venture.

Tennessee Illustrated, Whittle said, was to be a

(Continued on next page)

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households—Rochester launched one of America's most expansive and expensive efforts to rebuild a system whose test scores and dropout rates consistently ranked it as one of the worst in New York State. Goaded by a "Call to Action" by the Rochester Urban League and funded by hundreds of millions of dollars from taxpayers and local corporations like Eastman-Kodak and Bausch and Lomb, chilly Rochester in 1987 became, as *U.S. News* put it, the hottest place on America's education map.

Rochester's throw-money-at-it approach was not without a guiding, and good, idea: freeing the hands of teachers to do what they're supposed to do—butt into the lives of kids and make them learn in whatever way works. What Chris Whittle, in his obsession with uniformity, fails to realize is that good schools leave room for passion, giving people freedom to experiment, adjust, and respond. But in the unreconstructed Rochester schools, as in most others, administrative dicta spewed forth on everything from what days to read *Silas Marner* to assignments on the weekly cafeteria detail. Correspondingly, teachers worked to the rule, got raises like clockwork, and earned the minimal respect they deserved. Students learned, if they were lucky.

Fortunately, renegade Rochester Teachers Union leader Adam Urbanski and Superintendent Peter McWalters, a former Peace Corps Volunteer and veteran teacher, didn't think that was the wisest way to reach at-risk kids. So they battered out a historic agreement. Teachers would receive a 40 percent pay increase over four years—vets could receive as much as $70,000—but they'd damn well have to earn it. They would go to students' homes, stay late, and tutor individually. They'd mentor weaker teachers, develop curricula, plan special programs and events. So empowered were teachers by the changes that administrators actually sued for being cut out of the

Whittle, Down to Size

(Continued from previous page)

"new restaurant of words. Expect the unexpected from *Tennessee Illustrated*. We are going to celebrate the past, clarify the present, and contemplate the future, be intelligent without being overly sophisticated, objective without being cynical, fun without being ribald, and provocative without being antagonistic." It was hyped as the next *Texas Monthly*, a dynamic voice for the state.

But *Tennessee Illustrated* didn't have time to find that voice. For the 12 issues that comprised its short life, a colorful format featured pieces on the myth of Davy Crockett, a visit with Alex Haley, and a selection of 20 Tennesseans as "Good Folks." There was little controversy and less hard-hitting politics. Whittle's most forceful editorial suggested that the state ban billboards in favor of tourist-information radio channels.

Tennessee Illustrated may have made dull reading, but it made decent political sense for the impresario. At the time, it was clear that Whittle had political ambitions, but he had not said which party he favored. Add that to a dependence on ad revenue from utilities and banks—important political players in the state—and there was a clear reason for Whittle to stick to campaigning, as he did in his column, for apple-pie issues: in favor of small towns, against "unsightly" billboards, and for innovative education. Political magazines, he said later, are "a bad business." Opinions, since they divide, often are.

Helping kill *Tennessee Illustrated* was not only that uncertain editorial approach but money. Whittle had used his famous "category-specific" advertising approach—selling ads to a single producer of a given product—and four giants in the state bought in: South Central Bell, Baptist Health Care System, First Tennessee Bank, and the Tennessee Valley Authority. TVA invested $750,000, but pulled its ads after a year to cut costs. The loss of the sponsor, coupled with vanishing revenues, drove the magazine from a bimonthly to a quarterly, then out of business altogether.

Yet as *Tennessee Illustrated* was dying, an undaunted Whittle was making what he called "the most successful magazine launch in history" with six *Special Report* publications—one on sports, one on health, and the like—blanketing doctors' offices across the country each quarter. The advertisement-gorged magazines entered the market (Whittle thinks in market terms, not audience) with the understanding that doctors, who'd get the magazines free, would not be allowed to have more than two non-Whittle magazines in their waiting rooms. It was a new idea, and the advertisers loved it. But again, it didn't necessarily have staying power.

As the years passed, the six quarterly publications dropped to three; now, there is one bimonthly

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supervisory process. There was a tradeoff, of course. Rochester taxpayers now demanded teacher accountability. And Urbanski's union, to collective amazement, agreed to waive some seniority rights, tie pay in part to performance, and give officials a little help in weeding out incompetent teachers.

Today, mention of the district's modest improvements in elementary reading and math scores still pops up from time to time in the education press. But statistics tell a more complicated story. There are still almost as many dropouts as graduates. Only half of Rochester high schoolers passed the state's Regents math and English test, down from more than 60 percent two years ago. The number of black students who averaged a B or better through four years of high school is the lowest in five years. Last year, the Urban League summed it up: These are the same "crisis conditions" as in the bleak days preceding reform.

But why? Rochester respected its teachers. Rochester empowered its teachers. Rochester paid its teachers like accountants. So how good are those teachers? In Rochester, that question is irrelevant, since it's virtually impossible to fire the bad ones.

Thanks to the same state and union requirements that make getting rid of poor instructors arduous and expensive across the country, the head of Rochester school personnel estimates that only about 2 of more than 2,000 tenured teachers have been removed—or "counseled out"—every year since reform began. Meanwhile, the Rochester teacher's union has rejected all pay-for-performance criteria in its contract, essentially reneging on its original agreement. The upshot? Even Urbanski admits that the epic reform hasn't changed the way teachers teach.

"We have teachers who fraternize—I mean, *have sex with*—teenagers, and they're still teachers," says Marvin Jackson, head of Rochester's District Parent

Special Report, and that's part of what Whittle calls an "interactive multimedia system" of TV shows, magazines, and take-home booklets. That means that while waiting in the doctor's office, you get to watch Joan Lunden host a 60-minute television show—described by the corporation as "a mix of expert advice, hard-hitting investigations, consumer and health updates, quick quizzes, commentary, comedy, slice-of-life features, and celebrity profiles and interviews." And here's the Whittle touch, the innovative, break-the-mold feature: "The system is made unique by its interactivity: Segments on the show frequently refer viewers to complementary or follow-up information in the booklets or magazine."

A *Special Report* vice president says the move from print to video in his division of Whittle reflects the companywide trend toward electronics, the more profitable venture of the two. And, lately, profits matter more than ever. This year, Whittle Communications' have plummeted.

What could be the problem? Whittle has made his fortune by eliminating divisions between public and private, bringing commercialism into contexts that were previously free of such forces. He did it with Channel One in public schools; in his Whittle Books division, he sticks ads from corporations like Federal Express into books by John Kenneth Galbraith and George Plimpton. But Whittle has never demonstrated sustained devotion to any idea except one: that amorphous new "media" are out there waiting for him to exploit.

Schools are about ideas. They're about books that should be read whether they pay for themselves or not; they're about rising above market forces, however briefly, and instilling a larger sense of the world. If a magazine fails, you can close it. If a school fails, you have failed students, not customers. Whittle likes the big gesture, and he seems to crave respect. But he is a salesman, and the bottom line always comes first. It came first with *Tennessee Illustrated*, and it came first with *Special Report*.

And so, as the romance with Whittle and Schmidt trips along, remember that Whittle has failed in the past for many of the reasons Edison is at risk: raising long-term capital; informing a product with discernible, intelligent content; and sustaining the promise of the pitch. That should be some comfort to those who fear the Whittle plan's effect on public schools. But only *some* comfort, since one thing makes the Edison Project more dangerous than the rest. If we keep exaggerating Whittle's invincibility, people may begin to believe that it's safe to ignore the public schools—which will leave those schools even worse off if Whittle's latest brainchild gets abandoned, half-grown, by its impatient father.

—*Jon Meacham*

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Council and a parent of five. "We had a middle-school teacher hit a kid. Parents freaked, but absolutely nothing happened to that teacher. But mostly, we just have some plain old bad teachers, and nothing ever happens to them."

In fact, at current levels of pay, in five years three quarters of those teachers will make $60,000 just for showing up—a fact that gives Whittle and other acolytes of educational competition real claim to the moral highground, and not just in Rochester.

Of course, with a million bucks of his own money countering the education lobby, Ross Perot did manage to secure merit pay in Texas; Bill Clinton obtained a one-time-only basic literacy test for Arkansas teachers back in 1983. But there, in that corner of the map, you have all the significant state-level reform in teacher training and evaluation since *A Nation at Risk*. Almost everywhere else, a diploma—earned with a host of questionable pedagogical courses, a few weeks of practice teaching, and virtually no testing of subject knowledge—still equals a license to teach. Once teachers get those licenses, you can only hope that the semi-literate ones also have a predilection for pedophilia; little else will get them dismissed.

Teacher quality is an educational necessity that liberals are particularly shoddy at confronting. Teachers obviously deserve protection from unfair job actions, just as they deserve decent pay and working conditions. But as Rochester parents understand viscerally, there is another issue here—one of expectations. While pay can't be tied inextricably to performance until the wonks create the perfect test or the administrators fill classrooms with uniform percentages of good kids and bad, allowing teachers to teach with no real-world standards has predictable consequences. In Rochester, for example, state-level reform recently changed the way students would learn math; the new thing, sensibly, was mastering concepts and critical thinking instead of memorizing formulae. Yet what was good for students was a pain in the neck for their teachers, who would have to revise their ancient lesson plans. With no incentive to change their ways, they balked, clinging to the old memorize-the-Pythagorean methods. Droves of students failed their state math exams.

Even sadder was the fizzling of one of Rochester's most promising ideas. Every high school and middle school teacher had agreed to counsel 20 pupils and get involved with their parents—a plan to ensure that in reformed Rochester no child would slip quietly between the cracks. But some teachers refused to visit their poorer students' homes. They were petrified. Parents across the city quickly organized "diplomatic corps"—local parents who'd escort teachers into the projects. But the teachers wouldn't use them. Now the corps don't exist anymore, the teachers aren't making their visits, and you can almost hear the cracks widening.

Office politics

If Rochester's plan was to shower money and power on teachers, Chicago's plan was to wrest it from administrators and give it to parents. And when you ask Chicago school officials about the success of their dramatic decentralizing plan—one the *Tribune* called the most radical assault on the administrative power structure in American educational history—you invariably hear the story of Spry Elementary. There is a good lesson there, but not perhaps the one the central office wants to convey.

A few years back, the overcrowded, underfunded Spry was the fief of a Bad Old Principal whom parents routinely complained about to an indifferent central office. Then came reform, which usurped the central office's power and gave local councils composed of parents, who know what's best for their kids, the power to fire principals and set policy for individual schools. Heady with this new control, the first thing the Spry council did was dump that Bad Old Principal for someone more responsive and aggressive. Today, Spry's classes are smaller and its test scores are inching up. Parents are happy, teachers are happy, students are happy. In fact, everybody seems happy except the students at Clay School across town. That's where the Bad Old Principal now collects his salary.

From Chicago and Cincinnati to Washington and San Diego, decentralization of school administration is the latest banner of the reform crusaders, and its premise is a sound one. By cutting bureaucracy and loosening central office control, principals and teachers can be more responsive to the needs of their particular kids. And without the central office gobbling up funds, they'll have more money to respond with. Yet a peek behind the press releases suggests that this new trick is nothing against one of the oldest: bureaucratic inertia.

When William Bennett called Chicago the "worst school system in the country" back in 1988, he was stepping onto a pretty sturdy limb. Half the students dropped out before graduation, and high school achievement scores ranked in the lowest 1 percent of American schools. The administration, on the other hand, was doing fine. Central office workers were spending twice as much every month to trim and water the plants in their offices as they handed out for school supplies in the city's poorest elementaries. Meanwhile, layers of administrators couldn't even

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accomplish their most fundamental task: getting teachers into classrooms. Every day, thousands of students arrived at school to find neither a teacher nor a substitute in front of the class. "It's just a fact of life," one administrator reassured the *Chicago Tribune* at the time. "It's always been like this."

Finally, Chicagoans' frustration erupted. Unprecedented public, business, and press support led to the 1988 reform legislation that set a cap on the size of the administration and reallocated money to the schools. An astounding 17,000 people—mostly parents—ran for 4,300 seats on the newly empowered school councils in 1989, and more than 300,000 people turned out to vote. But by last year, a third of the council members had quit, frustrated; only 3,000 ran for the empty seats. What went wrong? Well, if you think you can't fight City Hall, try the school administration, whose "Club Med mentality," as parent Ron Sistrunk dubs it, has proved as durable as the roaches in the lunchroom.

Consider the number-one decentralization "strategy" issued by the administration: "Disassemble the Central Service Center" at the central office. A perusal of the restructuring plan shows what it really means isn't dismantling, but *renaming*—as the "Central Resource and Training Center." Another job-preserving technique comes under the heading "eliminat[ing] administrative impediments": not cutting staff or streamlining procedures, but researching and writing a series of procedure manuals that include development of "a master matrix . . . of the stakeholder groups."

How do administrators get away with this rearguard action? Easily. School boards come and go; parents get frustrated with inertia and arcana. Thus administrators have been able to wait out "reform" until public interest wanes. And that's apparently what Chicago Superintendent Ted Kimbrough intends to do. In fact, all this harping over administration sort of bores him. Instead, he says, "We need to focus on the classroom."

So let's. When the Consortium on Chicago School Research recently polled thousands of Chicago teachers, 57 percent of them reported that the restructuring has had no effect on what they do in their classrooms. Now come closer and see how reform has changed Farren Elementary, where geography—it's nestled into the world's largest housing project, Robert Taylor Homes—has traditionally been destiny.

Here, the city reports that *100 percent* of the student body is low-income, and test scores are among the city's lowest. Has reform come to the rescue? This year, Farren's supply budget was cut 95 percent. To purchase the necessary paper and paper clips, Principal William Auksi had to shift the money from programs for kids with remedial learning problems.

"They had enough money," Auksi shrugs. Not surprisingly, tiny Farren does have enough funds to support two handsomely paid assistant principals.

No comprendo, teach

So even a "reformed" education establishment manages to keep bad teachers on the payroll, strangle creativity, and lavish on itself funds meant for kids. But perhaps the most damaging thing isn't what that establishment inflicts, but what it fails to share—power with the parents who have the most to gain and lose from the quality of their children's schools. In Chicago, that's a side effect. In Chelsea, Massachusetts, it's a disease unto itself. There, the disenfranchising of parents has sabotaged one of the most promising and well-intended reform movements in the country.

When John Silber's Boston University (BU) finally obtained a 10-year contract to run the Chelsea schools over the fierce objections of the teachers union and school administration, it was a little like winning a vacation home in Love Canal. The small district was the poorest and arguably the worst in the state. A third of the mostly hispanic student body couldn't do coursework in English, and its dropout rate, the highest in the state, was just barely higher than the rate at which its teenaged girls had kids. But BU was anything but daunted. "I don't want to be arrogant or grandiose," John Silber said at the time, "but I don't think it's utterly fanciful to say we're testing the future viability of American primary and secondary education."

As expected, the conservative Silber took on the patronage-laced administration with ferocity, and by 1990, with a salary boost as sweetener, he cajoled the teachers union into merit pay. But when it came to the classroom, he had a plan that would warm Hillary Clinton's heart. In Chelsea, teaching kids would begin outside the classroom, with health care, parent literacy programs, early training in English. In short, the Chelsea plan would hand over to teachers kids who were, in the education catchphrase, ready to learn. It was a swell idea—indeed, probably the most important in educating underprivileged, at-risk kids, who currently make up about a third of America's public school population. But Silber's perestroika overlooked one thing. More than half of Chelsea parents couldn't even understand BU's various projects, let alone participate in them.

As the schools' new leaders went on cross-country speaking tours to discuss their plans, parents fumed that none of the all-important hearings BU held to air its plans were in Spanish, nor were any of their reports translated. And the university was fairly clumsy

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with its symbolism. It abolished a longstanding position of bilingual program director, deputizing a non-hispanic teacher to take over the vestigial work.

Silber and company, justly proud of their programmatic accomplishments—elementary school reading and math scores had increased, while Chelsea High SAT scores shot up 14 points in a year—treated the unhappy parents as kevetchers: "the ain't-it-awful crowd," one BU administrator dubbed them. Weren't they giving them good health care, a rich assortment of afterschool programs, and, for once, accountable teachers? Still, the first state study of the takeover, in 1990, sided with the moms and dads, calling the BU contingent "arrogant and devaluing to parents and others who are members of minority groups." A federally funded study a year later echoed the charge. As the state panel observed in fluent educationese, "The university seems to have underestimated the need for continuous socialization of important issues with various constituencies." The community was more direct. When Silber attempted to speak to parents about the schools' financial problems, he was drowned out by jeers.

Failing to translate reports or hire hispanics seems rather forgivable in the context of a huge reform plan. Yet four years after the historic contract was signed, oversights like those have proven pivotal, because Chelsea parents didn't just express their hostility with noise. City leaders, keying into residents' feelings, cut the schools' budget dramatically, crowding classrooms and stymieing many of BU's planned reforms. The results of that underfunding are now being felt acutely: The reading and math scores that leapt up in the first years of reform recently sank beneath pre-takeover levels. "It's just a big monster," charges Juan Vega, member of the Chelsea Commission on Hispanic Affairs, of the reform effort—not seeming to realize that it was all supposed to be done for his kids, not *to* them.

Chelsea's current crisis is an extreme manifestation of a standard problem in education reform. From Rochester to Chicago to D.C., even well-intentioned reformers tend to act like summer-stock Coriolanuses when it comes to parent involvement. They pay lip service to the notion but work doggedly to keep the masses from messing with their plans. Unfortunately, longitudinal studies suggest that the treacly concept of getting moms and dads engaged is almost certainly the linchpin of students' educational success. That task isn't very difficult when your student body is middle class and raised in families that value learning. The challenge is students who are poor, usually urban, possibly hungry, and brought up a world in which education isn't necessarily a priority. Administrators have to *work* on and with these parents. And while the payoff for doing so can be astounding, administrators tangled up in the details of running a school tend to find apathetic moms and dads more convenient.

Convenient, that is, in the short run. It may not be tomorrow, or even next year, but, as Chelsea's parents indicate, citizens excised from the reform process can prove far more toxic to change through their votes in elections and on bond issues than by their "meddling" in a third grade class. This fall, hispanic parents actually threatened to keep their kids out of school, while BU muttered about taking a hard look at the practicality of its long-term investment in Chelsea.

"At this point, it would be a blessing if BU just left," says Juan Vega. The university's hand-picked superintendent, Peter Greer, has already taken the hint. Earlier this year, he resigned to run a private school in New Jersey.

"F"ing school reform

To be sure, from each of these hope-freighted reforms have sprung some triumphs: Spry Elementary's makeover, the rising elementary scores in Rochester and Chelsea. And in the context of so much bad news about public schools, it's tempting to be grateful about good news, however small. Perhaps the goal is, as Churchill said about democracy, to be, not the best, but the least bad.

But the trouble with toasting Rochester, Chicago, and Chelsea for slender gains is that they had the leadership and the motivation to be a lot more than least bad. They aimed to empower good teachers and get rid of bad ones; to wrest money and control from bureaucracies; and to include families, whatever the class differences and difficulties, in a learning process that precedes and transcends the classroom. In their early days, these three cities held the keys to real reform. And then they lost them.

The dampened hope in Rochester, Chelsea, and Chicago should make liberals not just furious, but determined. If we really believe that funneling public money into private schools is wrong, we have a moral obligation to address the politically hazardous sources of public school reform's continued failure—tenured incompetence, administrative protectionism, parental detachment and alienation. Until we do, there's little guarantee that the next Brilliant Ideas for reforming our schools from within won't be more wasted efforts. Only this time around, the casualty list may include, besides all those Peggys unleashed into the economy, the notion of public education itself. □

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TIDBITS & OUTRAGES

"AND SO MY FRIENDS, THE NEXT TIME YOU ARE STRUGGLING WITH TEMPTATION, JUST REMEMBER THE IMMORTAL WORDS OF NEIL SIMON IN 'LOST IN YONKERS,' NOW RUNNING AT THE RICHARD RODGERS THEATER ON WEST 46TH ST . . ."
The New York Times reports that Broadway producers are now giving away free tickets to ministers and rabbis in the hopes that they will mention their shows in sermons.

"KIM, LIKE WHO IS THAT OLDER GIRL NEXT TO THE DORITOS TAKING NOTES?"
According to *The Wall Street Journal*, a woman earned a Ph.D. from the University of Washington with the 301-page thesis "Sociable Speech in the American Slumber Party," which she researched by attending 110 hours' worth of teenage girls' sleepovers.

HEY, WHILE YOU'RE AT IT, SEE WHAT IT'S DONE TO THE SLUMBER PARTY SCENE
The Census Bureau recently announced plans to hire a consultant to study Yugoslavia in order to produce "an analysis of the effects of the current civil unrest on the emergence of newly independent countries and on the rates of growth or loss of population . . ."

MARLIN FITZWATER SAID THEY TASTED GREAT
A Houston boot maker gave George Bush a $4,500 pair of boots specially designed for him to wear at the Republican National Convention. The shoes were marked with the inscription "Home Town Boy" and the G.O.P. elephant logo inside a red, white, and blue outline of Texas.

"I'LL GET TO THOSE NEWSPAPERS AS SOON AS I FINISH SCREENING THESE VIDEOS."
The *Los Angeles Times* reports that Clarence Thomas refuses to read newspapers or watch television news, adding that when a friend of the jurist commented on the death two weeks earlier of Alex Haley, Thomas was startled because he didn't know the author had died.

TONIGHT'S EPISODE: CRACKING THE SOLZHENITSYN RING
Variety announced that a U.S. production company has made a deal for a television series based on the KGB's files.

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Armed, Angry, and Acne-Prone

No one ever said cutting the deficit was gonna be pretty. . . .

by Matthew Miller

12:48 p.m., Tuesday, October 13

"We interrupt this program for an ABC News special report. From Washington, here's Peter Jennings."

"Good afternoon. After watching nonviolent attempts to reduce the deficit fail for years, America's children have taken matters into their own hands. Approximately 20 minutes ago at the downtown Marriott Hotel, Richard Darman, the president's budget director, and Robert Reich, one of Bill Clinton's senior economic advisers, were taken hostage at gunpoint. A group calling itself Overindebted Underage Terrorists for Radical Approaches to Generational Equity—OUTRAGE—is taking credit for the kidnapping. OUTRAGE says the group will kill Darman and Reich if their deficit-related demands aren't met in full. Standing by live at the Marriott is ABC's Brit Hume. Brit?"

"Peter, the trouble began during a youth leadership conference at which Darman and Reich spoke today. According to one woman who escaped the early gunfire unharmed, the two advisers had just agreed that, though the deficit really is the biggest problem the country faces, it couldn't be honestly discussed in the campaign because the American people aren't ready for the hard choices required to fix it. Suddenly an Uzi-toting 15-year-old sent a burst of fire flying by Darman's head. A phalanx of other teens sealed the room after evacuating bystanders and clubbing two secret service men unconscious. We've been told the teenagers have locked Reich and Darman in a small closet. We await details on OUTRAGE's demands."

"Thanks, Brit. Right now we're going to take you live to the Pentagon for a press conference with Colin Powell, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff."

"General, I understand the White House has aske that the military be put on alert. What can we expect?"

"Budget-related terrorism has traditionally been low priority for us, Peter. However, army intelligenc has accessed information showing that, yes, the goveri ment has dumped trillions in debt and unpaid promis on the next generation that may well have doomed the standard of living and condemned them to spend the lives servicing debts that paid for our consumption. Bı we simply don't have contingency plans for young buc get vigilantes."

"Any concern that this may not prove to be an isola ed incident?"

"We're advising citizens, especially well-off soci security recipients, to stay indoors as much as possible.

Later that night

Tom Luce rubs his eyes, fumbles for the phone, an squints at the digital clock. It's 3:18 a.m. A few montl earlier the Dallas lawyer might have expected a state pe tition organizer ringing for more instructions. But wit the campaign over, only one person could be calling th late.

"Tom," says the familiar Texas drawl. "I've bee talking with Paul. You and the boys get over here rigl away. We've got another rescue to mount."

Noon, Wednesday, October 14

". . . and so to our demands: First, starting tomorrov and continuing indefinitely, we want every network evening news to devote half of each broadcast to ex plaining the deficit and options for fixing it. We wa

Matthew Miller just completed a White House Fellowship.

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'ed Koppel to run a nightly show on the debt, as he did vith the Iranian hostage crisis. In addition, we insist that luring prime-time hours, all channels display a series of ıudget facts along the bottom third of the screen.

"During all other hours, the bottom of every channel nust feature a digital 'National Debt Clock' showing he spiraling total and the per-household share. Large coreboard-style versions of these debt :locks must also be ıung in every congressional office, as well as n the Oval Office and ›n the White House awn.

"Finally, we demand that legislation granting instant voter egistration for all 18–o 30–year-olds be ›assed within three lays, along with an ap›ropriation for a $1,000 cash payment hat these young peo›le will be eligible to :ollect at the polls in hree weeks if they vote.

"If these conditions ıre not met, make no nistake: Richard Darnan and Robert Reich will die. . . ."

The message ends. The MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour wastes no :ime in unleashing its favorite pundits, David Gergen and Mark Sheilds.

"Well, these kids have picked an interesting tactic by demanding better coverage and education from the media," Gergen says. "It could backfire though, because Darman in particular is not liked by the press. It's quite possible that a number of network executives would let Darman die rather than risk their ratings."

"Mark?"

"These kids have handed Bush a real election-eve gift. With only three weeks to go, the president has a golden opportunity to call in troops to crush this rebellion. He'll be known as the guy who kept the world safe for debt as we know it."

"Let's go now to Roger Mudd, who has the two candidates standing by. Roger?"

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"I'll be speaking first to Bill Clinton, who joins us from Chicago. Governor, what's your take on these demands?"

"Roger, I call for the immediate use of all necessary force, including air strikes and ground troops, to end this crisis and restore order. Let me say, however, that I do understand and agree with those who say negotiations could bring a breakthrough and avoid a senseless loss of life."

"Let's turn now to President Bush in Kennebunkport. Sir, some conservative strategists are saying you should take this opportunity to dump Richard Darman, or at least unleash a massive rescue assault that assures him martyrdom as a face-saving exit. What do you plan to do?"

"Roger, when that phone rings late at night at the White House, the person who answers it better be thinking about more than just killing off inconvenient subordinates. I just hope that for once the liberal media acts responsibly and ignores this cheap attempt to expose people to budget realities that Barbara and I think American families will find obscene."

Later that night

News presidents from the three networks and CNN huddle in an emergency meeting in New York.

"We can't run this stuff," says NBC's Michael Gartner. "The elderly groups will be on us like a cheap truss. Listen to this. 'Contrary to popular myth,' " he reads from OUTRAGE's fact sheet, " 'Social Security beneficiaries get back between two and five times what they paid in to the system while they worked. Payroll taxes on the younger generation's smaller workforce will double in just over a decade to honor the generous retirement benefits we've voted to give our retirees.' "

"Can we check this stuff out with our own people?" asks Tom Johnson of CNN.

"Get real. Our news division doesn't know squeeze about economics or budget issues."

"Same with us," says Roone Arledge of ABC.

"Bo-*ring*."

"Wait—maybe there's an angle here," says Arledge. "Those OUTRAGE kids aren't bad looking. And some of them are from ritzy families. I could see Diane being blindfolded and taken in to interview a kid while Sam does the parents in their Park Avenue duplex. A split-screen special. Reaching out for love in spite of the budget that divides them. I'll bet it does a 30 share."

The others look at each other.

"We could run a promotional tie-in around whether viewers have learned the budget factoids," says Eric Ober of CBS.

"How long do you think we could drag this thing out?"

The four men smile and extend their hands to one another.

11:30 p.m., Thursday, October 15

"I'm Ted Koppel, and this . . . is 'Nightline.' Tonight, on day three of 'Debt in America: Bankrupting Our Children,' we'll bring you a world exclusive —the first statement from hostages Richard Darman and Robert Reich. But before we do, let's check in on the Bankruptcy Watch. Here's ABC's Forrest Sawyer."

"Ted, glance at the Prudential toteboard and you'll see that the national debt rose by another billion dollars today, to $4.02 trillion. That means that the average American household is now on the hook for nearly $43,000—more than its net worth. At this rate we'll add about $400 billion in new debt this year, which means interest payments next year will increase by about $30 billion. What's that all mean? Next year interest payments alone will rise by 10 times the amount it would take to fully fund Head Start, which the government says we still can't afford. Kinda makes you woozy, doesn't it? Back to you, Ted."

"We go live now to the Marriott, where the hostages are about to get their first chance to speak. Let's listen in. . . . "

The camera reveals two expensively dressed, well-groomed hostages seated behind a long table, like co-anchormen.

"I'm Dick Darman."

"And I'm Bob Reich."

Together: "And for years both our parties have lied about how we got into this deficit mess and what it'll take to get out of it."

Reich: "Democrats love to gripe that the Reagan tax cuts of the early eighties caused the yawning budget gap we're plagued by now. That was true for a brief time, but not today. Despite the myth of the low-tax Reagan years, subsequent tax hikes agreed to by both parties—especially on the regressive payroll tax—have the federal government taking about 19 percent of the GNP in taxes today, the same amount it claimed in 1980."

Darman: "Republicans who squawk about 'big spending' are ready to cut everything except the only programs big enough to bring us into balance. Our explosively growing entitlement benefits now make up 45 percent of the budget—which works out to a whopping 60 percent of what's left over if you take out interest and deposit insurance payments, on which we simply can't default.

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"But because the media never caught on to this simple math, we've been able to fudge it with rhetoric for years. It's a great deal for everyone—unless you're planning to live past the year 2000."

Reich: "This campaign season we've dreamt up even more sophisticated ways to lie. Democrats are saying it's okay to borrow as long as you spend the money on long-term investments, like infrastructure, R&D, and education. That's true enough. But no one's yet noticed that while the Clinton plan calls for $200 billion in new investment over four years, it adds a nifty $1.1 trillion in new debt. We're screwing our children big time!"

Darman: "Don't be too hard on yourself, Bob, because we Republicans also have fancy ways to bugger the kids this year. We say you don't have to cap Social Security, just Medicare and other health-related entitlements, because they're the ones that are really growing so fast. But Social Security is heading toward bankruptcy within the decade, unless it's bailed out by huge tax hikes on our kids. Naturally we'd prefer to let that happen on someone else's watch. So we won't raise a peep about controlling the benefit side now—though with $15 billion a year going to households with incomes over $100,000, there are plenty of ways to save."

Together: "What's the upshot? We hold budget summits each year striking sham deals that defer urgent investments while saddling our kids with fresh mountains of debt. The media never gets it, and the charade continues."

The screen goes black for a second.

Ted: "The joint statement appears to be over. Back now in our studio to talk with Norman Ornstein. You've been around the block a few times. What do you make of it?"

"Painful to watch, Ted. This statement was obviously made under duress. Candor like that doesn't come easy to seasoned pros."

1:30 p.m., Tuesday, October 20

A copycat group calling itself TWISTED—Teens With Insufficient Savings To *Ever*payallthis Debt—takes George Mitchell and Bob Dole hostage. Another youth group chains the executive directors of the American Association of Retired People and the National Committee to Preserve Social Security to the giant national debt clock on the White House lawn. The National Guard is called out in Florida to provide perimeter defense of condo communities from Boca Raton to Miami. Valiant seniors stand watch with shotguns on putting greens across the state.

Meanwhile the television keeps blasting budget facts. Toddlers, repeating what they have learned, ask their parents why interest payments now edge out defense as the federal government's largest expense—and why 70 percent of the money we borrow will go for interest on debt already piled up, just like third-world-debtor style. Still, Bob Teeter's numbers, if true, are the biggest surprise: 18– to 30–year-olds would be the swing vote in every key state in the coming election; 63 percent of Americans view a desire to means-test entitlements as the threshold test of a candidate's character.

Hearing this, Bush immediately summons Teeter and other top aides. "Mr. President," Teeter says flatly, "this election will turn on who's got the most credible deficit reduction plan. It's that simple."

The group looks grimly at their leader. Bush repeatedly has pledged never to touch Social Security or budge an inch more on defense.

"All right, gentlemen," Bush says at length. "Let's put a real plan on the table—one that'll make Perot's deficit-reduction strategy look wussy."

His aides bolt into action and scurry from the room, but not before Bush calls out for one of them.

"Stay here a minute, Dick." The president and his defense secretary wait for the room to clear out. "What's the latest intelligence?"

"That Rudman-Tsongas group, the Concord Coalition, *has* been funnelling arms to OUTRAGE, TWISTED, and several splinter groups we're tracking."

"OK," says the president. "Proceed with Operation Antcrusher as planned. Launch the rescue at noon on Thursday. No prisoners. I'll unveil the new deficit plan the same day, and we'll ride the wave of Strength and Responsibility into the election."

12:15 p.m., Thursday, October 22

The commandos kick down the sealed bedroom door and let loose a hail of bullets. They find the hostages in the living room of the suite. Richard Darman and Robert Reich are munching room-service sandwiches.

"Finishing lunch," Reich says. "You just missed the kids."

"The man who took them left that note," Darman says, pointing with a still-greasy finger to an envelope on the coffee table.

The commanding officer rips open the envelope. There is one handwritten line:

"George—You didn't think I'd let these young heroes fall into your hands after they saved the country, did you? Never leave the brave behind!"

Turning to the window, the troops see a chopper, already half a mile away, with the words "Perot Systems" gleaming in the sun. □

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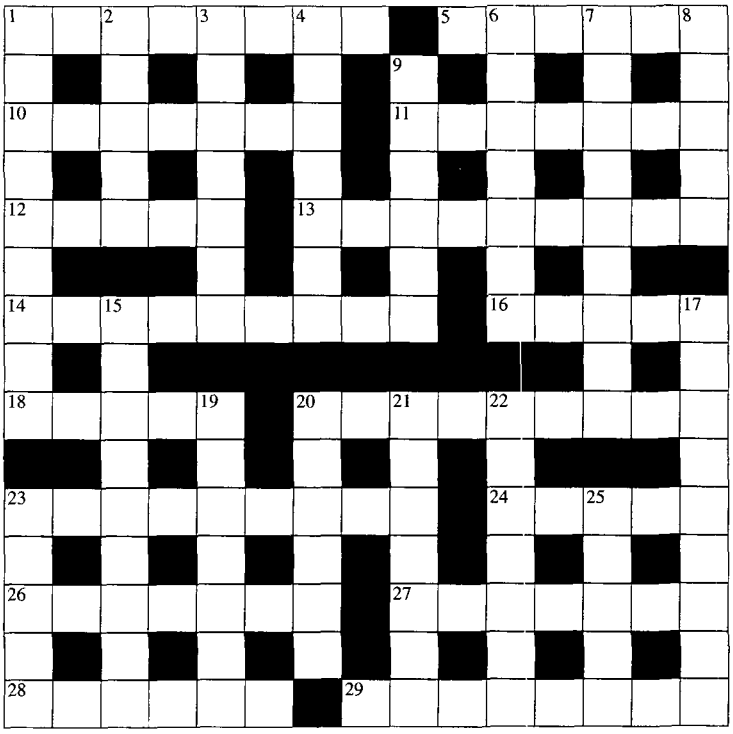
POLITICAL PUZZLE

by John Barclay

The numbers indicate the number of letters and words, e.g. (2,3) means a two-letter word followed by a three-letter word. Groups of letters, e.g. USA, are treated as one word.



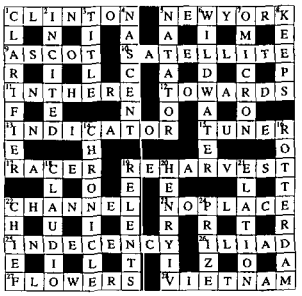
ACROSS

1. They show something fuzzy in studies. (8)
5. They should be beat? (6)
10. Something honorable is not mine improperly. (7)
11. Backer plays reruns after Friday the third. (7)
12. In the isle of Capri last month . . . (5)
13. . . . execution modified ring argot. (9)
14. Crude hand worked for resort operation. (4, 5)
16. Eastern teacher was badly treated before note. (5)
18. Adjust Ford front tire to bring up to date. (5)
20. Raises little standard improperly for big losses. (9)
23. Believer trailing in some electricity data. (9)
24. Woman concealing marital status for Moslem leaders. (5)
26. Evil African follows beast before zealots start to make chemical change. (7)
27. Separate parts in suite arrangement. (7)
28. Values from 5 Across, for example. (6)
29. Campaign issue confuses brain, too. (8)

DOWN

1. Chief from small company preceding 2000 and the queen. (9)
2. Hotel hesitation is private. (5)
3. Crazy, wet Long Island Railroad figure in parade. (7)
4. Midday when old horse gets in shape. (7)
6. Controlled sunspot fixes plumbing. (7)
7. Carelessly reach ruin for Andrew, for example. (9)
8. Call for quiet wig to show disinterest. (5)
9. Contemptuous form of address for Harris when he returns. (7)
15. Bad times fade for losers' mentality. (9)
17. Demands new sins to sin. (7, 2)
19. Petty court proceeding around four. (7)
20. Washington agency and Kennedy form a line? (6)
21. Give in to 200 bums chasing around Utah leader. (7)
22. More brilliant heirs in disarray. (7)
23. Take off on initial state policy on oil fuels. (5)
25. Excuse liberal short in artificial intelligence. (5)

Answers to last month's puzzle:



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Motherload

If we care so much about building strong families, why are we forcing single welfare moms to work full time?

by David Segal

If you've heard either presidential candidate podium-pounding about the need to get welfare mothers working, you have a pretty good idea of the direction that the welfare reform debate is going these days. But for a better sense of what's being said—and not being said—in the make-them-work rhetoric this political season, get yourself a copy of *Moving Ahead*, a June 1992 study by three Republican members of the House Human Resources Subcommittee on Ways and Means.

The authors open by calling for a return to the two-parent family, a change that would restore families to the "civilizing task" of raising children. They go on to warn that the children of the 3.4 million female-headed families living below the poverty level face greatly increased odds of "having poor school attendance and achievement, dropping out of school, committing crimes," and so on. But if you think that these lawmakers went on to argue that moms of such at-risk children should have the chance to provide both money *and* time to their children, well, you're half right. In its 59 plaintive pages, *Moving Ahead* utters not a peep about how these mothers will engage in the "civilizing task" of bringing up their children or how they will keep their kids from the very perils described at the outset. The math of the study's policy prescriptions, for moms with tots of all ages, is predicated on those moms working a 40-hour week.

Family values: By now you'd rather strangle your grandparents than hear the phrase again. But in welfare reform, talk about family values isn't just rare, it's stood on its head. This summer, Bush told the country in his acceptance speech that he's "for dads sticking around," but when dad is already gone, Bush stands foursquare behind experiments in welfare reform that compel the remaining parent to go to work full time. While Hillary Clinton

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tried to bake her way into the hearts of homemakers around the country, her husband stumped with some of the toughest get-a-job talk yet offered by a Democratic presidential hopeful. But for all the wind about personal responsibility from both candidates, neither is saying anything about welfare mothers actually *parenting*.

"There are two separate discussions going on about the same issue," says Diana Pearce, director of the Women and Poverty Project, an advocacy group for low-income women's issues. "You see lots of press about middle- and upper-class women going back home, struggling to juggle their careers and the demands of motherhood. But when we discuss the lower class we put on a different hat. We never ask how they are going to be good mothers, and we never ask what is the best way for them to bring up their children."

The silence of liberals, traditionally sensitive to issues of fairness to the poor, is especially odd. Perhaps some think that pushing to let welfare moms spend more time at home with the kids implies standing against women entering the workplace. For whatever reason, the issue has gone largely unmentioned. "The policy question of how to treat parents with very young children is looming," says Mark Greenberg of the Center for Law and Social Policy, a nonprofit public interest law firm. "But generally, the discussions just focus on the cost of child care instead of asking what is best for the child."

Recession-pinched Americans may be in no mood to fret about how welfare mothers raise their kids. But if, as is generally believed, part of creating strong, emotionally balanced children—the kind that hold down steady jobs and stay off welfare when they grow up—means being around to rear them, there are unexplored dangers in welfare reform's full-time work rhetoric. After all, the worries that bedevil middle-class single mothers also bedevil welfare mothers—only more so. And currently there are few options, like part-time work or work at home, that give welfare mothers the leisure to instill in their children the values that Republicans and Democrats now stumble over each other to champion.

Worksnare

The genesis of the recent push for full-time work is traceable to the 1988 Family Support Act, the scion of a Democratically controlled Congress and Ronald Reagan, which took the first step to change Aid for Dependent Children (AFDC) from an income-support scheme to a workfare program. Health and Human Services mandated that single parents on welfare with children over four years old "participate" in job training, school, or, most optimistically, a job for at least 20 hours a week, and required states to provide day care. Teen moms not enrolled full time in classes could be required to go back to school immediately after their children are born.

Since the act was passed, a number of states have applied for waivers allowing them to gnaw away at exemptions to include more moms with younger children for more hours. Oregon won a waiver from HHS to mandate full-time participation for any mother with a child over one year old. In Michigan, a consistent trailblazer in welfare reform, mothers with kids aged one year and older can be compelled to work full time or face a cut in benefits.

Asking welfare recipients to work for their checks is undoubtedly a good, even overdue, idea, but the push for work shouldn't be fired by the sense that welfare moms want to languish in front of the soaps all day instead of earning a living. There clearly are many women addicted to their welfare checks, the kind who won't work unless threatened with sanctions. But contrary to the enduring stereotype—resurrected by Bush right in time for the campaign—only 20 percent of those ever on welfare are long-term users.

From the most eager workfare proponents, you're more likely to hear that they are asking of welfare moms no more than what is freely given by moms of all incomes. As Utah Department of Human Services eligibility coordinator Gene Hofeling puts it, "Our purpose is to mirror what is going on in society so that people in need of assistance are not treated any differently than anyone else is treated." And here's Mickey Kaus, in *The End of Equality*, proposing to replace cash doles with a WPA-style jobs program in which only moms working full time would get incomes above the poverty line: "No excuses for not working. Women and men. Married and single. If you have a child, be prepared to carry an extra burden. These are the rules the mainstream culture tries to live by, and they are the norms that are in danger of disappearing entirely in the underclass."

But is full-time work for mothers one of the rules that mainstream society lives by? Only a third of all married mothers work full time throughout the year. And these women have a partner to assist in rearing the children, plus more money and conveniences—like cars and microwaves—that make juggling the earner-parent roles easier. And of those moms who work, only 23 percent have children under three. Truly reflecting what is going on in society would mean that the children of welfare mothers, like the vast majority of children, get a healthy dose of parental presence in their lives.

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Currently, the assumption is that day care will substitute for that parental presence, a prospect that has some conservatives waxing Orwellian. "AFDC did away with the welfare dad," says Robert Rector, a welfare and family issues analyst at the Heritage Foundation, "and now some people want to see day care take the place of the welfare mother. We could have an entirely state-raised class of children."

Rector may be paranoid, but it's pretty rational to suspect that the real price of the full-time work trend will be paid by children raised in the disorienting world of low-cost day care. Pennsylvania State University psychologist Jay Belsky, who in the seventies was one of academia's leading proponents of day care, has since found that for young children, the separation from parents undermines their "sense of trust, of security, of order in the world." Most at jeopardy, Belsky says, are infants in day care for 20 hours or more a week. A 1984 study judged 31 percent of those children insecure; when researchers focused on children who spent 40 hours a week in day care as infants, the figure rose to 65 percent.

Changing our attitude about welfare but not its ground rules has led to an incentive program that managers at a pre-glasnost Yugo plant would be proud of: In all but 10 states women face close to a 100 percent tax rate four months after finding work.

Child specialists who disagreed with Belsky's findings when they were first released countered that the important variables in day care were continuity and quality, both of which are scarce commodities at the low end of the business. Day care workers average $10,000 to $12,000 annually; four out of ten of them leave their jobs each year. As for quality, the compensation levels provided by the government are, understandably, not high enough to buy anything but the cheapest day care on the market. In 1990, the Child Care Employee Project, a California-based organization dedicated to improving day care, judged 227 day care centers in five cities on characteristics such as staff-to-child ratios, harshness of staff to children, and staff turnover. Most centers were judged "barely adequate."

If present trends continue, it is in such barely adequate settings that ever greater numbers of underclass children will spend the waking hours of their formative years. The experience of Jamie Cutter of Lansing, Michigan, could increasingly be the norm. Cutter ended her relationship with her boyfriend shortly after she got pregnant her senior year in high school. Two weeks after the birth of her son Joshua, she was attending vocational school to be a medical assistant and working part time as a waitress. Unable to find a doctor who would hire her, she took a full-time job as a cashier. Since June, Joshua, who is now 20 months old, has been spending his days and part of his nights in a day care facility in downtown Lansing. "I've been working these late hours lately," she says. "It gives me zero time to spend with him. And I can be gone all day and all night and when I get back he's not happy to see me. He won't even kiss me. It's really upsetting. His dad has noticed a difference too. He's like, 'Why don't you spend more time with him?' But I really don't have a choice." Gauging the damage to toddlers of absent moms is necessarily an inexact science, but you don't need Benjamin Spock to tell you that Joshua is missing out on something important.

At the same time, there's evidence that Joshua benefits by seeing the example set by a wage earner. The gist of new research, by Dolores G. Norton of the University of Chicago and others, is that when a mother adheres to a schedule—goes to work and brings home a paycheck—the chances are greater that her children will be disciplined themselves. They will be more likely to be good students and more inclined to work when they reach adulthood.

Are women thus confronted by a damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't choice—being a positive role model and a lousy mom, or a lousy role model and a good mother? Not if they can get good part-time work or work at home. Every one of the positive examples being set by a working mother—the morning regimen of getting dressed for work, the earned income—can be set with a part-time job as well. And kids can also learn the work ethic by seeing it first hand when mom works out of the home. (Infants are another story. It's hard to imagine how a child of a year and a half or younger could benefit more from an example he can scarcely understand than from a mother who is around to provide him with love and attention.)

Admittedly, there are more than a few obstacles to both alternatives. Part-time workers, even accounting for their reduced hours, generally get paid less than nine-to-fivers—60 percent less, according the Department of Labor. And, worse for women, part-time workers are not covered by the Equal Pay Act, so

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there is no legal recourse to gender-bias in wages and less incentive for employers to treat their female employees fairly.

Complicating matters, most part-time jobs don't offer health benefits, which can make welfare-to-work programs a round-trip ride for even the most motivated mother. Because the government provides health benefits for only a year after a person leaves the public rolls, when junior gets sick, falling back onto the dole to get Medicaid is a shortcut to care. "We've often said that we should just set up a welfare office in K-Marts," says Diana Pearce. "They are the kinds of places that offer part-time work to welfare moms but don't give them health benefits. So when their children get sick—and every kid gets sick a couple of times a year—these women go back to public assistance." With the rules rigged this way, being both a good worker and a good mother is a zero sum game.

Mommy tact

Giving moms who work a fighting chance at their dual roles will start with reforms that make part-time work a viable option: guaranteeing that part-timers get paid the same per hour as their full-time counterparts for the same work, making pensions portable, and substituting the employer-based health care system we currently have for universal coverage. Women of all income levels stand to gain from these reforms, but the government is not pushing for them, and unions—even ones like the Teamsters, with 400,000 female members—have yet to put flex- and part-time work anywhere near the top of their agendas. They think part-time work undermines their contract negotiations. And unions have actively battled work at home in the courts, fearing that workers earning sub-union wages in the comfort of their homes will undercut dues-paying laborers.

Many of the most daunting roadblocks to fair welfare work are not entrenched in the economy but inked in the law books. Back in 1935 when AFDC was conceived, it was envisioned as a way to provide for widowed mothers so they didn't have to go to work, freeing them to provide care to their children. But in the last three decades, mothers, married and single, entered the work force by the millions, causing more and more voters to wonder why moms on the dole couldn't do the same.

While the public now wants welfare to act as a leg-up-for-work program, the bulk of the system's regulations are still geared to the antiquated handout approach. Changing our attitude about welfare but not its ground rules has led to an incentive program that managers at a pre-glasnost Yugo plant would be proud of: In all but 10 states women face close to a 100 percent tax rate four months after finding work, a dollar for dollar reduction in benefits for everything earned above the AFDC grant. The crucial first step is, borrowing Harvard professor David Ellwood's phrase, to "make work pay." That entails expanding the earned income tax credit that allows those on the dole to actually earn money when they work.

Could a program that combined part-time work and generous earned income tax credits lift moms out of poverty? If New York State's Child Assistance Program (CAP) is any indication, the answer is yes. The scheme, operating in seven counties since 1988, is among the rare welfare experiments in the country to acknowledge, in the words of New York State Department of Social Services Commissioner Mary Jo Bane, "that parenting obligations may preclude [a welfare mother] from working full time." While taxpayers get a sense that they're not subsidizing laziness, CAP children get a parent who can play with them, prevent them from overdosing on Ninja Turtle cartoons (or anything else), and explain why the sky is blue; in short, they get a mom.

CAP's chief innovation is shaving benefits by only 10 percent as a woman gets to the poverty line and then reducing them by two thirds after that. The checks continue until a family is at 150 percent of the poverty line—around $13,000—which, not coincidentally, is close to the national median income for a woman with two children and no husband. The program also received a federal waiver to eliminate another incentive-crushing relic of old welfare assumptions, the assets test, a rule that cuts off welfare to any family with accumulated equity. Putting some money in the bank lets CAP mothers cushion against job instability, which makes them less likely to return to welfare when they run up against temporary setbacks.

The program doesn't replace AFDC so much as provide a rational alternative to it: For CAP to make economic sense, a family needs to be making $350 a month. Though it offers little by way of job search assistance or training, CAP is a step in the right direction because the average recipient's work stint is 25 to 30 hours long. The theory is that once a woman gets set in a job she will win promotions and raises that will eventually bring in sufficient funds to get her off welfare. "We intentionally set up the algebra so that women can work part time," says one of CAP's architects, Bill Shapiro. "Thirty hours is the average week for mothers in the mainstream economy. Expecting a single mother to work 40 hours is not realistic."

The program's limited run has already yielded promising, if modest, results. Slightly over 3,000 people have enrolled in the program since it start-

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ed; more than 800 of those have left the dole, a significant success rate in an area where triumphs are usually measured in single digits. Some 1,700 are still receiving benefits, but even these families are costing taxpayers less because benefit levels are lower in CAP. Less than 700 have gone back to AFDC.

Work fair

Work programs, especially ones that shoulder training and job search costs, are expensive. Most states have been unable or unwilling to put up enough money to retrieve all of their federal matching funds. Today, states are drawing down, on average, only 65 percent of what Washington has made available to them through the Family Support Act. A first step to "moving ahead" may be for legislators to put some money where their ardor is. While Michigan, for instance, makes more mothers with younger kids eligible for full-time work, it has ponied up for only 34 percent of its matching funds. New rules qualifying more women for entrance into underfunded programs is an easy sop to angry voters, but more money in training and education is what will get mothers working.

Three years ago, a poll by *The Washington Post* found that 62 percent of mothers working full or part time outside the home would quit if they could afford to. For those in the economic mainstream, it's become almost axiomatic: Kids gain from having their parents around. Why ask of welfare mothers something that the middle and upper classes believe will be toxic to their own children? New York's initial results suggest that with well-thought-out, commonsense, income-enhancing rules in place, cajoling mothers to work full time is not necessary. We should demand that welfare recipients join the workforce, but it is both unfair and shortsighted to saddle them with hours that punish their kids. □

The Washington Monthly JOURNALISM AWARD

FOR JULY 1992 IS PRESENTED TO:

Alissa Rubin

"What We Talk About When We Talk About Abortion"

The Washington City Paper

We thought we'd rather get a Pap smear than read another word about abortion. In her July 3 story, Alissa Rubin changed our minds. Her probing, dispassionate interviews with women waiting their turns in one D.C. abortion clinic slices through the ideology and shows us some of the reasons—from sheer convenience to appalling ignorance to virtual entrapment by a male lover—that women exercise their vaunted "right to choose."

Rubin's sometimes sickening reportage doesn't form an argument for either side; instead, her stories are an implicit challenge to both. As a 23-year-old who disdains "artificial" contraception comes in for her third "operation," it's hard to deny that we've made the taking of life a little too easy. But can we ask the terrified 15-year-old Iranian girl with so much growing left to do to bear the burden of the pro-life alternative? What we *can* ask, Rubin's story gently suggests, is that both sides make common cause, through frank sex education and aggressive advocacy of birth control, to keep women out of the clinic in the first place.

Deanna Lee

"Inside Tutwiler Prison for Women"

ABC "Nightline"

See Political Booknotes, page 59.

The Monthly Journalism Award is presented each month to the best newspaper, magazine, television, or radio story (or series of stories) on our political system. Nominations for any newspaper, magazine, or radio or television station in the country are welcome. The subject can be government in its federal, state, or municipal manifestation. Please send nominations to Monthly Journalism Award, 1611 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20009. Two copies of the article or broadcast text should accompany the nomination.

Nominations for stories published or aired in October will close November 15. The winner will be announced in the January/February issue.

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Capitol Hill 20510

Giving good quote, stealing credit, and other tricks for turning any congressman into a media darling

by Christopher Georges and Katherine Boo

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ood Senator Metzenbaum, conducting self-erving press conference number 999. There's hil Gramm, claiming credit for a project he ctually voted against. There's Jim Traficant, alling his colleagues a bunch of prostitutes. or years these trailblazers have been lighting our path to positive Washington press. By ollowing their example closely, you can scale ie congressional ladder in a fraction of the sual time, and with a fraction of the legisla-ve effort. Just ask Newt Gingrich, whose ame has been bandied about as a candidate or speaker of the House if the Republicans in a majority. His biggest legislative success as been a bill commemorating the invasion f Grenada.

Too degrading for an upstanding citizen of lastings? Make you long for the days when ongressmen worried more about Big Ques-ons than Good Hair? Well, grow up, son. Iost modern congressmen feel about the me-ia the way teenagers feel about sex: Once iey've recognized the possibilities, there's no oing back. And for you, there's really no hoice. You can lose sleep drafting arcane bills iat, if you're lucky, will be featured in *The rookings Review*. Or you can hop along with s down the Newt Route. It's shorter, and a eck of a lot more fun.

EIZE THE MOMENT

To most of the delegates sitting nearby on ie first day of this summer's Republican Na-onal Convention, it simply looked like an ac-ident: A camera light stand tipped over, rashed onto the head of a woman seated near-y, and knocked her unconscious. But that's ne reason why they're lowly delegates in oofy hats and Pennsylvania Senator Arlen pecter is one of the most powerful men in the enate. By the time the TV cameras focused, pecter was kneeling beside her, applying an ice-filled table napkin to her wound, and—yes!—offering the television audience a sound bite.

Turning to the camera, he reported that the woman "had taken a real hit . . . but is going to be fine. I think the rest of us have taken a real hit," he continued charmingly, referring to criticism he'd suffered in the wake of the Clarence Thomas hearings, "and we're going to be just fine, too."

The first rule of congressional media mongering is a lot like the first rule of the Boy Scouts: Be prepared. Capitalize on anything. Let no opportunity slip away.

PICK YOUR NICHE

Of course, by the time you get to Congress you've probably already learned the ins and outs of shameless self-aggrandizement; otherwise you wouldn't be here. Unfortunately, most Washington media opportunities won't hit you, or anyone else, in the head. You have to make your own. So let's move on to Rule Number 2: Pick your niche and stick with it.

Yes, claiming as your own some tiny speck on the issues map involves something you may not have a lot of—humility. It's tough to admit that no one cares a whit about your insights into the trade deficit. Yet the most critical skill of a media-successful congressman is the ability to be stunningly predictable in a limited area of study, because that's what the deadline media demand. Get on "MacNeil-Lehrer" and hog airtime explaining that you're actually reconsidering your stand on protectionism in the light of a new Congressional Budget Office report, and bookers will toss your card from their Rolodexes. The media folk want to sketch the issues in black and white with as little effort as possible. They want politicians who can be counted on to say exactly what they're expected to say.

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"All reporters have a staple list," says Susan Rasky, former congressional correspondent for *The New York Times*. "Three on the right, three on the left, three in the middle." Actually, it's more complicated than that. Reporters' Rolodexes encompass countless ideological/attitudinal subcategories, ready to be mined for a quote. Need the line on enterprise zones from a progressive Republican? You can always count on Jim Leach. From a man o' the people? Al D'Amato. From a Washington insider? Vic Fazio.

Or maybe you need a do-good consumer advocate outraged over the latest shenanigans at the FDA. Oregon's Ron Wyden is your man. A liberal to plead for federal child care? Who else but Pat Schroeder. A conservative geared up to gaybash? The one and only Robert Dornan. Fortunately for the newcomer, though, there are categories within these subcategories. Defense wonk emeritus: Les Aspin. Defense wonk of the moment: Barbara Boxer. The defense wonk of the future? Possibly you.

Having a role counts for a lot when you're trying to get some air time. But some roles will get you more play than others. Say you have some expertise on America's toxic waste problem. See you on local access cable. The smart mediamonger will latch on to a big, recurring topic—one he can ride again and again (look, no homework) into fame. For instance, "Nightline" will need to ring up a hawkish, pro-Israel politician every couple of weeks. *The New York Times* will need that position every other day. Which leaves a guy like Stephen Solarz—our man on Israel—sitting pretty.

If you're a reporter or booker in Washington, you've probably had 225-2361 committed to memory for years. But it wasn't always that way. When Solarz first showed up in Washington in 1974 as a congressman from Brooklyn, his notion of foreign turmoil was a shooting in the Bronx. As a freshman, he lobbied for an assignment on either the Ways and Means or Appropriations Committees. But when he drew a seat on Foreign Affairs, he immediately took off for a 20-day tour of the Middle East. Since then, he's made it his life—and his media niche—learning anything and everything he could about it.

Be Nice to Guys with Notebooks

But knowledge isn't enough. Fortunately, Solarz knows how to treat the press that feeds him. One congressional correspondent calls him a "non-stop press conference," and that's not far from true. He calls those conferences about as often as the entire State Department does. His ceaseless flow of op-ed's and press releases lets the entire Washington media know exactly where he stands, just in case they want to quote him. And don't worry: Solarz is accessible, and then some. One reporter recalls phoning the rep for a routine quote and leaving a message with his office. A few hours later Solarz, who, unbeknownst to the reporter was in Syria, phoned back in the middle of the night to conduct the interview.

Whether it's Gaza or the Gulf, reporters can count on Solarz to deliver exactly what they're looking for: the stand-tough, hawkish line. Which is one reason why he's made national headlines in the last year alone on the Persian Gulf, Zaire, Cambodia, the Philippines, Pakistan, China, South Africa, New Zealand, and Hong Kong. He's also reeled in profiles in each of the big three: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. "There are few things as comforting to a reporter as being 45 minutes from deadline and running down to the speakers lobby and, thank Jesus, there's Stephen Solarz," says Peter Osterlund, former congressional correspondent for *The Baltimore Sun*.

Give Good Quote

Yet if predictability breeds airtime, it's not enough. You've got to convey your predictable position—sorry, Pete Domenici—without putting the reporter or producer to sleep. You've got to learn the high art of the Outrageous Quote.

Sure, there's no logical reason the public should care what Al D'Amato thinks about federal banking regulators. But when he says, "These guys could screw up a two-car funeral procession," a reporter's gotta get it in. New York Rep. Charles Schumer, another sure bet for a soundbite, was once quoted so many times in a single issue of the *The New York Times* (he appeared in five different stories) that an editor handed down a memo chiding the reporters. But if you're looking for the very best quote in Congress, you'll have to turn to Youngstown, Ohio's Rep. James Traficant.

His legislative record is anorexic. About the only things he sponsors are "Buy American" amendments, which he slaps on any legislation that comes near him. (He recently attached one to a family planning bill.) He's got a history of legal and ethical problems. So why has Traficant garnered more network air time than most of Ohio's House delegation combined? Listen. . . .

➤On President Bush: "Those are not roses near the White House. That must be marijuana because President Bush seems stoned."

➤On granting $12 billion in foreign aid to the Soviet Republics: "I think it's time for Congress to tell the president to shove that $12 billion up his deficit."

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➤On the trade deficit: "We have a trade crisis ahead that will make the '29 crash look like a fender bender, and for all those who keep making light of it, in about 10 years, you try and eat your Toyota."

➤On the budget: "I believe that Dr. Ruth is beginning to advise the president on the budget because this must be a massive sex experiment the way the taxpayers are being treated."

What exactly does this sassiness buy him? More national media publicity in the last four years than Kentucky's Rep. Natcher, for one, has gotten in the last 40. And this without holding press conferences, without a leadership position, without using headline-grabbing hearings, in fact, without using anything except his mouth. Well, not just his mouth: Traficant also boasts a catchy visual. His favorite material is polyester, his favorite style bell bottoms with skinny ties.

Many of his congressional colleagues, and even some reporters, dismiss him as an "eccentric," a "lunatic," and a "nitwit." But none of that keeps him off the air. There was the glowing profile on "60 Minutes"; a front and center *Washington Post* Style section article headlined "Wild Man on the Hill: Ohio's 'Teflon Congressman' Making His Presence Felt"; recent appearances on "Crossfire," "MacNeil-Lehrer," and "ABC News with David Brinkley," two entire "Donahue" segments where he was permitted to rant on any topic he wished, and, of course, a regular diet of soundbites on the networks, especially

The Club

Perhaps there's no truly scientific way to define a mediamonger, but we'll try anyway. Using 3,000 press cites in a three-and-a-half year period as the standard, we tallied the figures for some of Capitol Hill's very best. (The print figures represent the number of stories in which each congressman's name appeared in a survey of more than 150 newspapers, magazines, and journals cataloged in Nexis between January 1989 and August 1992. The TV figures are based on a sample of three national broadcasts—ABC News, CNN, and "The MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour"—for 1992 only.) For comparison's sake, we also tallied the media take of a few more camera-shy members.

Some who made it . . .

House Minority Whip
Newt Gingrich
Print: 6,260
TV: 151

Pennsylvania Senior Senator
Arlen Specter
Print: 4,180
TV: 31

Texas Junior Senator
Phil Gramm
Print: 3,630
TV: 69

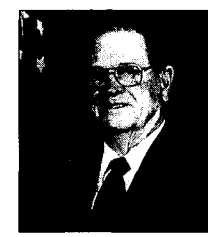
New York Rep.
Stephen Solarz
Print: 3,320
TV: 13

. . . and some who didn't.

Senate Majority Leader
George Mitchell
Print: 2,310
TV: 95

New Mexico Senior Senator
Pete Domenici
Print 1,920
TV: 15

House Majority Whip
David Bonior
Print: 960
TV: 21



Chair, House Appropriations Comm. **Jamie Whitten**
Print: 930
TV: 0

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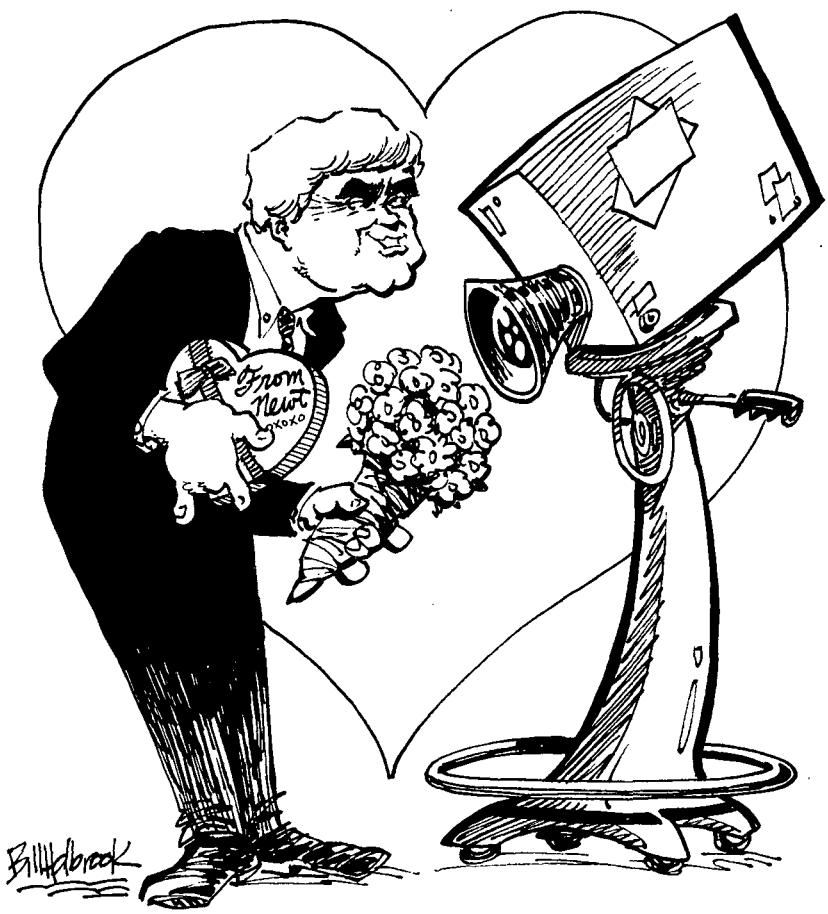
"Fox Morning News." "We're aware we use him a lot," admits CNN Capitol Hill producer John Roselli, "but sometimes his quotes are so good you can't resist." So good that in the Capitol, says one Hill reporter, the occasional rush to get a quote from Traficant has recently been dubbed a "Trafic-jam."

Bite the Big Dogs

A word of caution here: If your goal is simply to get your mug on the tube, Traficant is your man. But too many off-the-wall comments can remove you from the political map. "He's one I don't take seriously," says one veteran Hill print reporter of Traficant. "He's a caricature of what a legislator should be." You, on the other hand, want to be taken seriously. You're ready for the next level: using the media to accumulate real power.



Position papers? Trade bills? Forget it. Ask Republican Whip and Georgia Rep. Newt Gingrich—pick the fattest, most powerful targets, and then attack your way to the top.

Gingrich's legislative record is paltry, his efforts on behalf of his constituents virtually nonexistent. But so what? He is by far the most quoted, visible member of Congress. While Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell, for example, was quoted or cited in just over 2,000 stories in 150 of the nation's largest papers and magazines, Gingrich has appeared in more than 6,000 pieces during the past three years. And in 1992, he's appeared on, or been mentioned as part of, more TV stories (151) on ABC, CNN, and "MacNeil-Lehrer" than either Mitchell (95) or Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole (139). A comparison to Democratic Whip David Bonior is almost laughable: Bonior has earned himself less than 20 percent of Newt's print haul.

"His is not leadership by example," says Georgia Republican operative Jim Lovejoy, "but by soundbite." And in Gingrich's case, sound*bite* seems the right word. The nobody who arrived from Georgia 14 years ago has built his media monarchy by sinking his teeth into his betters. In fact, it was in waging a personal battle in 1984 with Tip O'Neill that the lowly three-term congressman from Jonesboro first made his name as a giant killer.

After O'Neill reacted to a Gingrich attack on contra aid as "the lowest thing I've ever seen in my 32 years in Congress," the press suddenly noticed little Newt and started to quote him. Gingrich's grenades have been flying ever since. Under the guise of ferreting out corruption, Gingrich has gone after House Speaker Thomas Foley (helping propagate the rumor that Foley is a homosexual), Barney Frank, and, in his grandest coup, former Speaker Jim Wright. In recent months he's called the Democratic leadership "sick" and its past three speakers "a trio of muggers."

How good is Gingrich at being bad? While dozens of politicians invoked family values at the Republican Convention this summer, the one line that drew the most media attention was his: "Woody Allen is not having incest

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with his daughter. He only has been a non-father because they have been a non-family." Sure, Gingrich was called onto the carpet by Republican colleagues for that whopper, but the next day his one-liner was the lead political story in the Atlanta papers, even though Bush had been in the state the previous day.

But you have to pick the right evils to exorcise, and Gingrich leaves little to chance. Although the media sketches him as a true believer—"As a Guerrilla or a General, Gingrich Has a Mission" says *The New York Times*—when Gingrich chooses an issue, he's a lot more likely to chat with a pollster than with the Lord. As Lovejoy tells it, Gingrich follows "the 80-20 system": When poll results show that at least 80 percent of those surveyed line up on one side of an issue, you run with it.

An aptitude for the grand slam doesn't just get you power; it lets you wriggle out of the occasional embarrassing squeeze. For instance, Gingrich came out swinging against pernicious congressional check bouncers, perk-mongers, and abusers of the franking privilege (which allows congressmen to send free mail to their districts) despite the fact that he's guilty of each himself. Yet the rep understands that while the breaking story gets the page-one headlines, detailed follow-ups naming names and citing numbers get buried. For instance, when Gingrich took on the frankers, the press lapped it up: "Gingrich Seeks to Seize Reform Label" was the headline over one *New York Times* story that pointed to his anti-franking effort. And who noticed the later story reporting that he was guilty of sending out twice as much franked mail as any congressman from his state? Similarly, his perk-busting campaign drew minutes of air time on CNN and the networks, as well as headlines like *The Houston Chronicle*'s "Foley Promises Reforms in House; Gingrich Rips Dems." Less interesting to the press were the later-learned facts that his Whip's office had a payroll of more than $750,000 and that he was paying a chauffeur $60,000 out of the public coffers.

"Most human beings are aware of the maxim about glass houses," says Rick Allen, a political analyst with CNN, "but not Newt." Rather, Gingrich's lesson for newcomers is that if you throw enough stones at enough important people, they'll be so busy dodging, your house will be left alone.

Steal Credit

Still, it's the rare creature who can accrue power while accomplishing so little. To sustain the good press, most newcomers, unhappily, will have to do *something*. Or rather, they'll have to look like they're doing something. And the role model for that trick is Arlen Specter, the Pink Panther of the Senate.

Ask the average American to describe the second-term senator and you'll hear something about his shameless questioning of Anita Hill; ask Capitol Hill insiders and they'll point to his shameless swiping of credit. "You have to have your eye on your back with Specter," says a staffer in one Pennsylvania congressional office, "or he'll show up at the last minute and walk off with the glory for things you've spent years working on."

Specter is so fast at stealing credit that he's changed the way the rest of the Pennsylvania delegation does its own PR. Staffers say they've taken to writing press releases days in advance of expected announcements of new federal funds just to be able to react as quickly as Specter. But if the technique has won the senator the resentment of a few colleagues, it's also earned him a library of positive press clips. Consider the recent legislation pushed through the Senate by Pennsylvania Senator (and Environment and Public Works committee member) Harris Wofford aimed at reducing the massive amount of out-of-state trash being dumped in Pennsylvania. Specter was not on the committee. Wofford's staff had no contact with him in drafting the legislation. Yet as soon as the bill was passed, Specter broke the story to the Pennsylvania press. One July 1992 report went so far as to label the reform "Specter's proposal."

While Specter takes credit for keeping trash out, he's even more brilliant at grabbing credit for pork coming in. After Rep. Joe McDade had lobbied for three years to bring a federally funded railroad museum to Scranton, the House approved funding, only to have it cut out in the Senate. Finally in 1989, when a House-Senate budget conference approved the $12 million pork, Specter was the first to call a press conference to herald the news.

Nor is Specter shy about swiping credit from the executive branch: A few hours after deadly toxins were found in railyards just outside of Philadelphia a few years back, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) dashed off a memo to all members of the Pennsylvania congressional delegation outlining a step-by-step cleanup program, complete with dates and places of action. Three days later, Specter reaped huge press coverage when, with cameras rolling, he outlined in great detail a plan of action that he personally would demand that EPA undertake. Specter's "plan," of course, was lifted from EPA's original memo.

You'd think by now the media would have caught on. Think again.

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Specter's campaign ads say, and the press repeats, that he's a force behind increased federal funding for breast cancer research—an important facet of his effort to woo women voters after the Hill-Thomas fiasco. Perhaps Specter meant an invisible force. It was Senator Fritz Hollings who was the prime player on the recent $279 million increase for cancer research (Senate insiders say Specter served mostly as spectator). When the Appropriations Committee held its mark-up on the bill, Specter was absent. When the bill went to the floor, he was tied up in the Thomas hearings. When it went to the conference committee, he made an appearance but didn't utter a word in support of the breast cancer provisions.

Nevertheless, the thievery redounds to his credit. In the last two years, Specter has appeared in, or been mentioned as part of, stories more than 70 times on CNN, ABC News, and "MacNeil-Lehrer." Some of this is obviously related to Anita Hill, but it's still remarkable compared to most other senators who share his approximate rank—such as South Dakota Senator Tom Daschle (3 mentions) or Nebraska Senator James Exon (5 mentions). Within the last few months Specter has offered nationally televised opinions on topics ranging from congressional ineptitude and the transfer of weapons technology to foreign nations to the Gulf war and the nomination of Robert Gates.

"One of the most dangerous places to be, with the possible exception of between a dog and his dinner," observes Bob McCarson, a press official for the campaign of Lynn Yeakel, Specter's opponent in this year's Senate race in Pennsylvania, "is between Specter and a TV camera."

Hold Sensationalized Hearings

Still, to be a real mover and shaker, most newcomers will have to dip into something substantive. For many veteran members, the sensationalized subcommittee hearing has done the trick quite nicely. Michigan Rep. John Dingell came to fame by tracking down $640 military toilet seats and scientific fraud, among other things, at his hearings. Stephen Solarz used hearings to expose the shocking truth about Imelda Marcos's 3,000 pairs of shoes. Yet in the last decade a new wave of congressmen has discovered that Hollywood stars get almost as much attention as sinister, self-aggrandizing autocrats—and they take a lot less work to get.

Need good press for a crime prevention hearing? Joe Biden brings in scarred model Marla Hanson. To promote child abuse prevention, he hauls out Oprah. Porn stars, as it happens, are doubly effective. When Specter sponsored hearings on child pornography, he dredged up an (adult) porn princess to testify that her boyfriend had forced her into her career at gunpoint. Specter hit the media jackpot—newspaper headlines like "Sex Offenders Cite Pornography's Influence" and "Ex-Porn Actress Wants Movie Suit Law," plus prime-time TV spots.

Newcomers may think the sexy angle has to be relevant to the substantive issue being explored. Old hands don't make that mistake. Specter not long ago packed a subcommittee room by holding hearings on Nazi war criminal Josef Mengele, to probe, of all things, the failings of the juvenile justice system. (Specter used the logic that a probe of Mengele was crucial to the issue as Mengele had been accused of conducting experiments on children.)

Above all, the pros don't let tedious committee appointments discourage them. Look at Ron Wyden, one of the more creative employers of the subcommittee's special power. From his outpost at the Small Business subcommittee, he's built a specialty in consumer and health-related issues—classic do-good Democrat territory. But Wyden knows how to pick his targets. Slim-Fast and the rest of the $33 billion-a-year quick-fix diet industry may not be a national scourge, but it will get you national press. And the media may cotton to a story on the mislabeling of over-the-counter drugs when your hearing hands them their story's lede: a sweet 72-year-old woman who almost died of a hemorrhage after taking regular aspirin. "His hearings are one-stop shopping," explains a Hill reporter who covers health-related issues. "He'll have a GAO report, a sexy topic, a quotable witness, plenty of background material, and of course, he'll be available himself to talk about it."

One reason Wyden can get the most out of reporters is that he knows how they think. He's the son of Peter Wyden, a journalist and writer of bestsellers like *The Overweight Society* and *Inside the Sex Clinic*. Of course, like his dad, Ron sometimes overstates it, as when he took on companies that advertise junk food during Saturday morning cartoon hours, arguing that the sweetened cereals are a "potentially deadly mix of sugar and fat."

Still, Wyden's hearings helped lead to 14 pieces of legislation in 1990 alone. Thanks to his follow-through, fertility clinics must now make public their success rates; Medicaid now covers senior citizens who wish to receive nursing care at home rather than at an institution; Medigap fraud has been brought under control; and there is a national data bank to track physicians with a history of misconduct or malpractice. But the personal payoff is his repeated good press in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, not to mention an appearance on "Geraldo." When the nets need a white-hatted consumer crusader, who better than the guy who took on Slim-Fast?

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Relax and Enjoy It

Still, you're thinking, it all seems just a little too sleazy. Is it worth it, elbowing your way onto "Nightline," wallowing in the hype, stealing credit? Of course it is. In five years you could be the next Newt Gingrich. And in 10 you could graduate to the top: the empyrean heights occupied by Texas Senator Phil Gramm. Gramm is respected, awe-inspiring, the very personification of power; he seems like he's been around forever. Who remembers he's a mere second-term senator from College Station?

How does he do it? If mediamongering were an Olympic event, Gramm would be a decathlete. He's mastered a niche, given good quote, attacked the Democratic Goliaths, blustered his way out of scandal, held high-profile budget hearings, and swiped credit from his colleagues. And he's ended up loved as much by the "Today" show as by the *Tyler Daily Telegraph*. Chances are that if you put this magazine down right now and checked your local paper, you'd find Gramm's name there somewhere. (Don't forget the TV listings.)

Take August 20, 1992, two days after Gramm delivered his address at the Republican convention. He was referred to or quoted in six different stories (plus a photo) in *The Washington Post*; four pieces (plus a photo) in *The New York Times*; four times each in the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Los Angeles Times*; three each in the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, the *Boston Globe*, *New York Newsday*, *USA Today*, and *The Washington Times*. He also appeared on CNN, National Public Radio, and ABC News—and even in the *Japanese Economic Review*.

Gramm carved his niche back in 1983, when he turned what could have been political suicide into the publicity coup of his career. A Democratic congressman at the time, Gramm was granted a budget committee seat by Speaker Jim Wright. But after Gramm attended the closed-door Democratic caucus sessions, he'd sneak over to the White House to share the details with Reagan budget director David Stockman. When his Benedict Arnold turn was discovered, his Democratic colleagues bounced him off the budget committee. But Gramm didn't crawl away. Instead, he repackaged the story as that of a young idealist taking on sleek liberal bosses intent on wasteful government spending. The Washington press lapped it up, portraying Gramm as a martyr. He switched his party, resigned his seat, and then rewon it in a special election. And his role was cast in stone: Congress's straight-talking wizard of the budget.

Gramm makes that role work because he has the ability to translate arcane issues into English. And as an author of Gramm-Rudman, he has a right to offer nationally televised opinions on the nation's economy. But Gramm has managed to parlay his dull specialty into arching credibility—in the last few months he's appeared on national news programs to discuss literally dozens of topics, from the space station to unemployment to defense spending to the Balkans—in part because of his ability to launch a good, homey quote for the jaded Washington press corps. "I didn't come to Congress expecting to be loved," he's fond of saying, "and I've not been disappointed." Another favorite: "I do the Lord's work in the Devil's city."

But don't be fooled by the small-town line. Gramm can attack like a street thug. During the Robert Bork nomination hearings of 1987, he put Ted Kennedy and Joe Biden into place with this zinger: "The American people know what the people who cheated in college think. We want to give them a chance to hear the qualifications of a guy who was a straight-A student."

He steals like a street urchin, too—and not just credit for laws he's had nothing to do with. Gramm sometimes takes it for projects he's actually opposed. "Gramm Announces Texas Library Grant Awards" was the headline over a story in a Comfort, Texas, newspaper announcing $7.2 million in U.S. Department of Education grants to public libraries in Texas in 1989. This despite the fact that the senator had consistently voted against the legislation to provide the funds. Again in 1989, he was the first to announce in Beaumont, Texas, that Lamar University had won a $1.5 million hazardous waste research grant, despite being one of only eight senators to vote against that funding.

Of course, Gramm's paid a price for his stunning solicitation of the press. No, not self-respect—just the everlasting resentment of most of the Texas delegation. Is it worth it? Well, there's hardly a soul out there who thinks all those Gramm '96 lapel pins at the Republican National Convention were referring to his next Senate race.

Now don't tell us it's still nagging at you—the tedious social cost of this political self-promotion? What do you mean you can't shake the feeling that, instead of holding sensationalist hearings, stealing credit from your colleagues, and performing irrelevant publicity stunts, you could be doing something, anything, to fix America?

Well, fine. Have it your way. Get up at five a.m. and review your constituents' rambling letters about health care and education. Sit down at seven and outline your position on Mexican water rights. By 10, when you're ready to take a break, you can still catch Newt on Oprah. And watch him carefully, son. In a couple of years he'll be running the country. And you'll be back in Hastings. □

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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release August 4, 1992

The President has signed the following legislation:

S. 992, which provides for the reimbursement of certain travel and relocation expenses incurred by Jane E. Denne when she moved from Lawrence, Kansas, to Las Vegas, Nevada, to accept Federal employment.

# # #

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People's Drugs

How two gay drugrunners changed the FDA

by John Crewdson

There is nothing in the heterosexual experience that remotely coincides with being gay in America today. The experiences that come closest are mercifully rare: seeing your entire platoon wiped out before your eyes, say, or answering the telephone on a Friday night to hear that your children have been killed by a drunken driver. Multiply one of those horrors by 10 and you get a glimmer of what life has been like for many gay men during a decade of watching their friends and loved ones succumb to a hideous death. As horrifying as the death itself is the inevitability that precedes it, waiting for the end while scientists and doctors search for a cure they might never find. But as Jonathan Kwitny shows us in this book*, not everyone has been willing to watch and wait.

By the time AIDS struck at the beginning of the eighties, many of this country's gay men had migrated to its biggest cities. Educated and affluent beyond the norm, they counted among themselves not only doctors and scientists but businessmen, entrepreneurs, lawyers, scholars, politicians, and other professionals who had grown distrustful of the straight establishment during the gay rights battles of the seventies. Driven by what appeared to be the impending extinction of their tribe, they set out to learn as much about the thing that was killing them as the doctors and scientists knew. And they succeeded, to the extent that a diner in a San Francisco restaurant is now likely to overhear a more lucid discussion of immunology or blood cell biology than can be found in many scientific labs.

AIDS, nearly everyone agreed, was caused by a virus called HIV. There exists a class of

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**Acceptable Risks.* Jonathan Kwitny. *Poseidon, $24.*

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drugs, called antiviral agents, that were designed to combat such diseases. These compounds, which had names like ribavirin, isoprinsosine, and dextran sulfate, were freely available in Mexico, the Far East, and Europe. But there was no way of knowing whether they might be effective against AIDS because none of them had been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). By law, no drug can be sold or prescribed in this country until the FDA has declared it both safe, meaning that it doesn't cause serious adverse side effects, and effective, meaning that it does what it is supposed to do. But the FDA hadn't seen any evidence that ribavirin and the other drugs available outside the United States were either safe or effective. For all the FDA knew, they might be dangerous, even deadly.

Deadly to whom? Jim Corti wondered. To Corti, a Los Angeles nurse, it seemed the height of perversity that those dying of AIDS were being denied drugs like ribavirin that could be obtained for a few dollars in any Mexican *farmacia*. There was some evidence that ribavirin interfered with the reproductive cycle of ordinary viruses. But even if this didn't include the AIDS virus, how could the FDA prevent a dying person from trying a drug that might prolong, if not actually save, his life? And if ribavirin should somehow cause that life to end sooner rather than later, who should make that decision? As Corti watched his friends sicken and die, he realized that the words "safe and effective" meant something quite different to someone with a few months, or weeks, to live.

Thus it was that Corti, at the wheel of his yellow-and-white microbus, blazed the trail for what would become the ribavirin run to Tijuana. From those weekend trips to fill orders for friends arose a thriving industry, a loose national network of illicit "buyer's clubs" whose organizers scoured the planet for drugs that might combat AIDS. No one who took ribavirin or any of the other underground drugs ever got well. Indeed, there is no case on record of even a single AIDS patient actually recovering from the disease, and the FDA remains unconvinced of the therapeutic value of ribavirin. Kwitny presents anecdotal evidence, as others have before him, that some lives may have been extended by ribavirin and a few of the other underground drugs that followed it across the border. Persuasive clinical evidence for most of them is lacking, but the FDA recently approved the use of one previously bootlegged compound, ddC.

As told by Kwitny, Corti's story reads like a rewrite of *Snowblind* starring Albert Schweitzer. Despite the gravity of his mission, Corti no doubt had a certain amount of fun jetting around the world, putting together big-money "drug deals" with a variety of colorfully shady characters, and running circles around the customs police of several nations. Still, the possibility remains that he might be a genuine hero. The case for Kwitny's other protagonist, a former San Francisco banking consultant named Martin Delaney, is less clear. While Corti played tag with the border patrol, Delaney took on the FDA. Arguably the most important federal regulatory agency, the FDA was a disaster area long before Delaney discovered it. In recent years, scandals at the agency have come to light involving generic drugs, breast implants, sleeping compounds and more. (Next on the list may be the FDA's decision to permit the nation's blood banks to continue using a seriously flawed AIDS screening test during most of 1986.) But none of these can match the FDA's heel-dragging in approving so-called "investigational" drugs, and its obdurate insistence that even terminally ill AIDS patients need the full protection of federal regulation.

Crossing Delaney

Delaney and I have our disagreements, as Kwitny makes clear, but the performance of the FDA in the post-thalidomide era is not among them. Nor are the underground experiments (now called "community-based trials") set up by Delaney and his followers to test the drugs that Corti and others like him were smuggling into the country. The scientific establishment detested these trials, not least because Delaney was field-testing drugs in ways that real scientists, who had to play by the FDA's rules, could not. What if, the scientists wondered, one of these weird compounds actually proved to be the magic bullet that cured AIDS? Would Corti and Delaney win the Nobel Prize for medicine? A more reasoned criticism concerned the absence, in most of the underground trials, of any controls. If 100 AIDS patients took ribavirin and all of them got better, scientists still wouldn't believe ribavirin worked unless another 100 patients who had been given a placebo were dead. Controls, the scientists argued, were needed to show that it was ribavirin alone that made the difference. But the FDA didn't seem to understand that one couldn't ask a dying man to take part in a drug trial in which he had a 50–50 chance of being given nothing. Apart from the ethical considerations, at those odds there simply wouldn't be many volunteers. And if the trial subjects got better, what more did the FDA or anyone else need to know?

Once it was clear that the AIDS community included people like Corti and Delaney who were not afraid to play by their own rules, the FDA and the

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giant pharmaceutical companies began paying attention. Once Delaney, a natural organizer and skilled negotiator, got through the door he was able to rewire parts of the federal bureaucracy simply by networking among confused, bickering bureaucrats. Not long after he forced the first grudging concessions from the FDA on the use of investigational drugs, Delaney found himself appointed to scientific committees and boards, becoming the AIDS community's self-nominated ambassador to the scientific establishment.

Profits and saints

Kwitny, an unusually good writer for an investigative reporter, has twined the stories of Corti and Delaney into a book every bit as compelling as any adventure novel. Because it is so uplifting, I would like to believe that Kwitny's story is true. Unfortunately, this book should be subtitled *The Jim Corti-Martin Delaney Story as Retold by Jonathan Kwitny.* Kwitny acknowledges, in an afterword, not only having fashioned composite scenes from events separated in time, but having reconstructed (i.e., fabricated) the direct quotes that give the story much of its narrative force. He attributes his decision to do this to a "reader preference for detailed dialogue," and it is true that time compression and made-up dialogue can make a book more fun to read, or a dramatization more fun to watch: *Acceptable Risks* is reportedly "in development" as a film at Warner Brothers. But if we are unsure whether the story told by Kwitny is completely true or merely incomplete, we can be sure it's the story Corti and Delaney want us to believe. Kwitny's afterword states that, although the author remained "the final arbiter" of the book's contents, both Corti and Delaney reviewed the manuscript prior to publication and will share 40 percent of the book's profits. Moreover, Kwitny apparently took most of what Corti and Delaney told him at face value. "I felt I could rely enough on their accounts," he writes, "not to clutter the book with attributions for statements based on the word of two people who are effectively colleagues as well as sources." The relatively small number of instances in which Kwitny notes any disagreement with his colleagues' version of events are neatly tucked away in footnotes where they do not interfere with the book's dramatic flow.

Even a commissioned, fictionalized biography does not have to be one-sided. In this one, however, the reader will search in vain for a single unflattering reference to either Delaney or Corti. This is especially remarkable considering that politics in the gay community is more convoluted than in the former Yugoslavia. On any given day, it's nearly impossible to know who speaks for whom. And while one would never guess it from Kwitny's book, Delaney's opponents are as vocal as his supporters. Although the San Francisco newspapers have quoted other gay leaders calling Delaney dictatorial, messianic, and worse, Kwitny does not even raise the question of Delaney's tactics and style, much less whether he has been co-opted by government access and pharmaceutical industry grants.

Whether Delaney is a nice guy is ultimately beside the point, because he has dedicated himself to saving lives, not being nice. But Kwitny's credibility suffers when he ignores the many members of the AIDS community who do not think Delaney is yet a candidate for sainthood.

Far more serious are the unsubstantiated allegations of profiteering that have been leveled at both Corti and Delaney. In a recent incendiary letter to the FDA, Delaney's most outspoken critic, a rival gay leader and Shakespearean scholar named Jim Driscoll, accused Delaney and Corti of a variety of deceptions and abuses, among them that Corti sold at least one AIDS drug, the now-legal ddC, on the underground market for several times its cost. Such allegations, which include rumors of secret foundations and Swiss bank accounts, have been heard on the streets of San Francisco and Los Angeles for some time. Disproving them should have been a piece of cake for a reporter like Kwitny, who made his reputation investigating the CIA and the mob. By steering sharply away from those charges or anything else that might diminish the cinematic superhero aura in which he cloaks his two characters, Kwitny does not do those heroes, or himself, any favors.

Earnest or dubious Gallo

Kwitny's selective reporting is harder to accept because of the strictness with which he judges other writers, including Gina Kolata of *The New York Times* and myself. Kwitny devotes pages of footnotes to various putative errors in Kolata's reporting of Delaney's activities, principally the underground trials of a drug called Compound Q. Kolata may well be a sloppy reporter—her recent story on DNA fingerprinting required a rare front-page acknowledgment that the *Times* had erred. But in writing about events of which I have firsthand knowledge, Kwitny himself makes errors, large and small, that he should have avoided.

I speak of what has, inappropriately, come to be known as the "Gallo case," my reporting of which happens to be the source of Delaney's—and by extension Kwitny's—unhappiness with me. The Gallo

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story is generally perceived as a squabble between French and American scientists over who discovered the AIDS virus. It isn't. Everyone, Gallo included, now admits the French are the true discoverers of the virus. The story is really about what looks like phony science, patent fraud, perjury, obstruction of justice, a fatally flawed AIDS test, the safety of the blood supply, illegal experiments on African children, and a Reagan-Bush administration coverup of abuses flowing from the recognition that the S in AIDS is actually a dollar sign.

So hideously complex has the Gallo case become that it is now fully understood by only seven people in North America, none of whom is Kwitny or Delaney. (Unhappily for NIH, one of the seven, Suzanne Hadley, the agency's former chief investigator, has just been reassigned to Rep. John Dingell's subcommittee on investigations.) In rising to Gallo's defense, however, Kwitny nevertheless makes claims in Gallo's behalf that even Gallo doesn't make, such as the assertion that Gallo had more than 25 isolates of the AIDS virus when he was accused of "expropriating" an AIDS virus sample sent to him from France. NIH investigators may also notice, two pages later, that Kwitny's recounting of Gallo's explanation for failing to publish his experiments with the French virus contradicts crucial portions of Gallo's own testimony.

Complexities aside, Kwitny and Delaney's point is that people with AIDS don't care who discovered the cause of this disease or how much credit they gave one another. They are waiting for somebody to discover a *cure* for AIDS, a process with which Delaney thinks the multiple ongoing investigations of Gallo's activities have somehow interfered. Near the end of the book, for example, Kwitny recounts Delaney's trip to Japan to talk to a pharmaceutical executive, Mr. Osada, about a drug that Gallo thought might cure Kaposi's sarcoma, a kind of cancer that afflicts some gay men with AIDS. When Delaney urged the company to make the drug available to Gallo for further testing, Osada mentioned that Zaki Salahuddin, the Gallo assistant involved in testing the drug, had just pleaded guilty to accepting illegal kickbacks. Kwitny writes:

> Without stating the final decision, Osada changed the subject to Gallo. Given the Salahuddin problem, the last thing Delaney needed that day was just what had happened—publication of another story in the American press that Gallo was going to be investigated yet again over the Crewdson charges. And Delaney was left to learn about it from Osada, who added gratuitously that all these newspaper articles aroused further caution about a joint research agreement. Thanks a lot, Crewdson, Delaney thought.

Gallo wasn't fired, the joint agreement was signed, and the testing of the drug has now begun, although it does not appear as promising as initially thought. And Delaney must know that the company's reluctance to go ahead primarily involved patent considerations and its belief that the number of gay men with Kaposi's sarcoma did not constitute a profitable market. But anyone who suspects that the NIH and congressional investigations have kept Gallo from his test tubes need only to look at his government travel records. And given the track record of Gallo's lab for mixing up and misidentifying viruses, the chances aren't particularly good that any of the scientists there could find a cure if somebody left it on his front porch.

Does it need to be said that people without AIDS share Delaney's wish that AIDS be quickly erased from the earth? Apparently it does. But is that incompatible with concern about the corruption in science and government the AIDS industry has spawned? Still, it is important for us to remember that it is Martin Delaney's platoon, not ours, that is being wiped out. □

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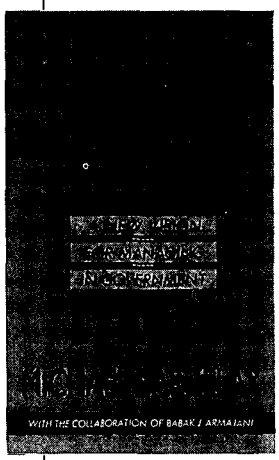

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Gettysburg Regress

The lofty promises and lowly debate of Campaign '92

by Peggy Noonan

In the 1962 movie, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, the working-class toff played by Tom Courtney sits with a friend in front of his mother's new TV and watches a British politician deliver a speech. At first they watch blankly, then they giggle. Soon they lower the sound and provide their own audio. "Buh buh *buh* buh buh buh *buh*. . . ." They shake their fingers for emphasis, looks of bland concern on their faces. The scene is deeply anti-establishment, and funny.

That, I think, is where the American public is this year as they watch their candidates for high office speak. Buh buh *buh*. . . .

Rarely has what politicians say been held in such low regard; rarely have books on rhetoric been so prevalent and popular. Why would this be? Perhaps the success of books such as Garry Wills' *Lincoln at Gettysburg* reflects an unmet national yearning for words that are elevated, pertinent, and true, that attempt to persuade and not only assert. No one expects this from the candidates this year, which may have something to do with the air of disappointment that already enclouds the process.

The problem is usually put this way: Isn't it sad that people no longer have faith in politicians? But I think the problem is that the politicians no longer have faith in the people. That's why they patronize voters. It's also why none of our current leaders will be remembered as great. Great leaders trust the people. The people can tell, and eventually trust back. This makes both leadership and followership possible, which makes progress possible.

The family values debate—actually, debate is too complimentary a word for the repetition of the words "family" and "values" in recent speeches—has further soured this campaign, and only partly because it has brought out the worst in each party (in the Republicans, prissiness; in the Democrats, lack of seriousness).

What is most obviously missing is a clear definition of terms and meaning. Those who speak of family values tend to do it with soft, muzzy phrases that both lull and confuse. "We believe in the family," and "As far as I'm concerned the family is the number-one building block!" All true, but so what? Democrats believe in the family; they don't have a plank in their platform called Destroy the Waltons. Republicans playing offense are somehow too shy to be explicit; one assumes this is in hopes that the voters will make their own associations, the more unpleasant the better.

When we use words not to clear up but to cloud, we show disrespect for the audience and the issues. I have a friend, a highly sophisticated former government official, who believes that the family values debate is really about this: The Democrats, obligated to various gay rights groups for money and support, will, upon taking the White House, include homosexuals as a minority covered by the nation's civil rights laws, a decision that will inevitably allow the legalization of homosexual marriage.

If my friend is right that this is what we're talking about—by the way, is he? are we?—wouldn't it be helpful to treat this issue, in the manner of the grownups we are, as an area of frank discussion? *Mr. Clinton, would you take actions as president that allowed or encouraged legalization of marriage between same-sex homosexuals? If you would, or would not, why? And what would you envision as the implications of such action? Mr. Bush, we put the same questions to you.*

To be direct and honest is to show respect; to be indirect and only suggestive is not just subtle but—nasty, creepy, low.

The issue has been undermined by its proponents. It has been reduced to the almost comically pinched,

Peggy Noonan is the author of What I Saw at the Revolution: A Political Life in the Reagan Era.

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or at least so it seemed when Marilyn Quayle, in an otherwise interesting speech at the Republican convention, boasted that not everyone in her generation took drugs or got sexually obstreperous.

As she said that, I had two thoughts. One—the first, I'm embarrassed to say—was, What dumb politics. Why make every boomer who in the seventies smoked dope, streaked, and approached the barricades of the sexual revolution feel unwelcome? I assume the majority of boomer Republicans did one, maybe two of those. So what? That's what college is for. It's precisely where you ought to do those things because you would look silly doing them at 40, when you're the president of the Parent Teacher Association.

Also, I may add, since I appear to be on a tear here, that for all our talk as a nation of our marvelous openness and tolerance, we've gotten awfully priggish lately. I don't remember that in the repressed, judgmental fifties anyone thought it fair or pertinent to criticize the Trumans, Luces, and Stevensons for going to speakeasies in 1928. (Most of us would like Harry Truman a little less, not a little more, if we found that, back in prohibition days, he had sniffed that if whiskey was against the law, it would never cross his lips, nor should it those of others.)

Bush's speeches keep pressing two themes:
1) We must stop the Democrats from spending more money, and
2) Let's spend more money.

Something tells me—and maybe I'm wrong—that the people may actually see through this.

The other thought on seeing Marilyn Quayle, and later Newt Gingrich when he suggested Woody Allen would be Clinton's top domestic affairs adviser, was: Isn't it sad that all this delegitimizes a real issue that people are hungry to see confronted and debated (the beginning, one always hopes, of improvement)—the issue of our country's cultural values. Our culture is increasingly violent, vulgar, cynical, and anti-child (or at least anti-childhood), and there is not a parent in America who does not see this and worry about it.

A small example. I grew up in a house where the TV in the living room was always on. At night when the news came on (note to the young: the news used to come on; it didn't always prattle away all day like an unwanted neighbor), we'd pay a little attention to Walter Cronkite, who would tell us CBS's version of what happened that day. We did not know at the time that we were taking part in a wholesome family ritual, but we were. We were understanding our country together and following its history through the news.

When I had a child I looked forward to these TV times. I would say helpful-mommy things like, That's the wind of a hurricane, which is a big storm, and that woman is the Queen of England. Later, I dreamed, I would get to say things like, That's a tax, which is a very wicked thing.

But I cannot watch the TV news with my son. No parent in America can watch local news with a child. The news gives children nightmares. They think the news is real; they think it depicts reality. They begin to think they live in a place where violent child abuse is prevalent ("Mommy, what does beheaded mean?"), where every day policemen are killed, where mothers are frequently shot as they walk to the grocery store, where sexual matters ("Mommy, what's a condom?") are endlessly debated. For at least a decade, though I did not notice until I had a child, watching the local news has been one more thing American families cannot do together.

A television producer would answer, We just bring you the news, we don't make it. This is partly true. What is also true is that the producer's decisions about what is said and shown on the air are determined also by his desire for money and success, which in his line of work come from ratings, in the pursuit of which the hotter and sicker the better. It has been years since the producer thought about the fact that he has a certain responsibility to the culture, but he does. We all do.

A debate on our culture, on its values, on what we can do to improve the human ecology, to clean up the muddy, airless river in which we all swim, ought to be discussed this year. It is, along with the economy, the thing that makes people think the future will be bleaker, not better. Our political leaders should be talking about it. They should, in fact, feel some anguish: They have children too.

Instead, we get tinny braying about who inhaled, who has the better character. Why? Why don't our political leaders look at things seriously? Is it because they think we do not think seriously? Is it because they fear the press will make them look stupid if they express concern about what is being carried on the airwaves around us? ("Quayle to Hollywood: 'Clean up or we'll censor.' " "Tipper zaps Zappa/Zappa zaps back.") Is it also that they are so in the habit of stoop-

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ing low they cannot stand straight, or think straight, anymore?

Who told them to stoop? Who told them that when you talk to the people you talk down?

In one of the most important speeches he would give in the 10 weeks before the election, Bill Clinton on August 25 gripped the podium at the national convention of the American Legion, cleared his throat, looked the Legionnaires straight in the eyes, and said, "I will work to ensure the VA gets the funding it needs to provide the excellent and timely care our veterans deserve." He promised the Legion virtual veto power on his choice of secretary of veterans affairs. He did not, surprisingly, wear a funny hat.

The same week, President Bush was in New Jersey, where he eschewed a normally reliable applause line—"This government is just too big and spends too much"—to unveil a new federal jobs program, the cost of which has been put variously at $2 billion and $10 billion. A week later, on September 2, the president went to South Dakota to promise wheat farmers a new $1 billion in export subsidies, and later that day, in Texas, threw in almost a billion in aid for farmers hurt in Hurricane Andrew.

It reminded me of the old Reagan joke that the difference between the federal government and a drunken sailor on a spree is that the sailor spends his own money. And, he might have added, doesn't, while on the toot, offer homilies on fiscal restraint.

Speech impediments

In different ways, the president and the governor have taken to the most egregious kinds of pandering, although the governor's performance seemed the more obnoxious, perhaps because it seemed so stupid. The Legion would never vote for him anyway, so why not use the forum to show strength? It was also insulting. When a politician panders to an audience like this, what he's really saying is: "I understand, my fellow porkers, that even though you wave the flag and make much of your love of country, what really motivates you is seeing to it that your interests are served. Don't worry. When I'm in charge of the federal trough, I will vigorously ladle to all the piglets."

As for the president, I have real doubts that it is going to resonate, as they say, with the public if he continues in his speeches to press two themes: 1) We must stop the Democrats from spending more money, and 2) Let's spend more money. Something tells me—and maybe I'm wrong, but hear me out—that the people may actually see through this.

What a year: The more you promise, the more contempt the voters have. People are more hungry for truth and less fed it than ever. And it is not the people's fault. Their leaders have lost a sense of them. They are so busy running the government and dealing with interest groups that they have forgotten that the people, as Sam Ervin liked to say, are not mocked. Or, if they are, at least mocked at the politician's peril.

To tell the truth

What happens when public disgust reaches critical mass? What would convince politicians that honesty wins, weasel words don't; candor wins, evasive language doesn't; belief wins, pragmatism doesn't? Or to put it another way: Pragmatism is not pragmatic. Belief is the only true pragmatism.

These three books* approach rhetoric from different angles. Among them, Safire's is most important, in part because it is the most comprehensive, in part because Safire is Safire.

The Pulitzer-winning columnist and known Bigfoot—at the Houston convention a college journalist approached him and asked, "Excuse me, are you a media biggy?" Safire lowered his voice and said, "You bet your life I am"—was also the foister, as a Nixon speechwriter, of the phrase, "nattering nabobs of negativism" on an unsuspecting world. Safire is unofficial godfather of all speechwriters. He loves the dodge, and honors it in this book.

The preface takes the form of a breezy speech that begins with the information that the speaker doesn't really want your ears, your attention will do, and builds to a declaration of what is to come, and ends with a peroration of such power that its author could not refrain from including crowd calls ranging from "Let us march!" to "You tell 'em, buster!"

This is a big book. It is almost three inches thick. It has almost 900 pages. It should come with a tube of Ben Gay for rubbing on the book-holding deltoids should the tome be perused at bedtime. (Repetition—in this case of the words "it is"—is a device, Safire reminds us, called ahaphora; the Ben Gay reference I stole from something S. J. Perelman inscribed in a big book he sent to Safire. Theft, too, is a reliable and traditional rhetorical aid.) This book would have to be big to range, as it does, from great speeches of ancient Greece ("Pericles Extols the Glory That Is Greece At the Funeral of its Fallen Sons") to memorable speeches by modern union leaders ("Lane Kirkland Rejects the Labels 'Liberal' and 'Conserva-

**Lend Me Your Ears: Great Speeches in History.* William Safire, ed. *Norton, $35.*

My Fellow Americans: Presidential Addresses That Shaped History. James C. Humes, ed. *Praeger, $49.95.*

The Bully Pulpit: The Presidential Leadership of Ronald Reagan. William Ker Muir. *ICS, $22.95.*

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tive'"). Along the way you'll meet up with Harry Truman's stump speech ("What it lacks in depth and shape it makes up for in zest"), Jonathan Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," Mark Twain's speech on speechmaking, Woodrow Wilson (who said, "Passion is the pith of eloquence"), Saint Francis, Sojourner Truth, and Salmon Rushdie.

Safire likes to be helpful, so he tells those who want to make good speeches that eloquence can, in a way, be acquired by osmosis: "Close the door, or go out into the woods with only a dog as an audience, and read these speeches aloud." To make it easier, he includes a sonorous tribute to the dog from a gentleman named Senator Vest, whom I think Safire made up.

There are informative and what look to me like well-researched short histories before each speech, putting them in context, telling us how they were written, where given, how received.

This is, simply, a great book that will, I suspect, become a standard reference text on oratory, providing generations hence joy and inspiration for you, your children, and your children's children.

James C. Humes' net is more narrowly cast. An adjunct professor at the University of Pennsylvania, he offers excerpts of presidential addresses that changed history, explaining how and why they came about and why he thinks they're great. There are behind-the-scenes anecdotes, some recounted with real charm, about the making and delivering of each speech. As always with such books, one can quarrel with some of the choices and praise others. Humes includes a chapter on Polk's inaugural address, calling it "Action as Eloquence," and introducing (to this reader at least) the important yet Carter-like figure of Polk. I'd never seen or heard of his inaugural; I'd been missing something. On the other hand, books like this tend to achieve balance at the cost of justice—there should be more Reagan. And I personally miss Jefferson's second inaugural (Humes includes the first), which was great because it was memorable and memorable because it was one long rant against the press.

Can we talk?

William Ker Muir Jr., I realized as I read *The Bully Pulpit*, is Sandy Muir, a professor of political science at Berkeley who used to work in Vice President George Bush's speechwriting shop upstairs in the Executive Office Building. He used to come by now and then and talk speechwriting with Reagan's speechwriters, of whom I was one. He was always a welcome presence; he seemed to think we were doing something important. Around 1985 he started coming by to interview us, and I remember being struck by the idea that, though he was asking me, he seemed to know more than I about the history of speechwriting and exactly what we were doing there at the EOB in our too big, badly furnished offices with the big, gracefully arched, dirty windows. I have relearned much about the Reagan years from this book, and discovered some things I didn't know.

Muir focuses on exactly how Reagan led, which leads the author to exactly how Reagan used words, and why he made the choices he did. But his intention, he tells us, is not only to examine Reagan's leadership style: "My objective was to find general lessons about leadership, ones that people everywhere could apply to their daily lives." There are stories of internal struggles over speeches, of clarity sacrificed to diplomacy, and of presidential decisions aimed less at speaking to history than at keeping the peace between warring agencies and aides.

For those who want to learn how a modern speechwriting shop is run, who are curious about how speeches are hammered out and how each decision carries at least a handful of repercussions, this will prove a valuable book. As to the reporting, I can attest that Muir's history of the failed speech Reagan gave to the European Parliament in Strasbourg is correct in all of its particulars, though too kind to everyone involved, including its chief drafter, me.

Perhaps young men and women in high school and college, reading these books and dreaming big things, will become immersed in the sound and sense of great rhetoric; and perhaps they will go into politics and elevate the debate by their presence. Maybe 21st-century rhetoric will sound not like people talking, but like people thinking. □

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Doves' Tales

Does American intervention abroad always involve cynical motives?

by Gregg Easterbrook

Did you believe *The New York Times* story that the Bush administration was maneuvering to invent a pretext to bomb Iraq during the Republican National Convention? The notion seemed so absurdly transparent that it was tempting to accept White House assertions that the story was a fantasy. Yet while complaining that the *Times* had hit below the belt by suggesting vulgar political motives in war, Bush officials also said something that escaped further notice: They protested that the *Times* account revealed national security information. In the standard catch-22 arrangement, the White House refused to comment on what the breached information might have been. But what security information could possibly have been in that story—except the operational details of a plan to bomb Iraq on pretext during the Republican National Convention?

If you presume that vulgar motives normally underlie great affairs of state, *The Ruses for War** is the book for you. In it, John Quigley, a law professor at Ohio State University and author of *Law After Revolution* and other books, argues that every American use of force or proxy force in the postwar era has been venal.

It's distressingly easy to show crass American conduct in Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Laos, and Cambodia, to name a few. Quigley makes the premise universal by asserting, for example, that the Korean War was entirely a cynical gimmick. In Quigley's view, the Soviet Union had no interest in North Korea; after all, it could have seized the whole Korean peninsula in 1945 if it had really wanted to. The Korean War itself was provoked by the grasping South. MacArthur retreated in the early months not because North Korean troops were pressing him but as a trick to create sympathy in Washington for the idea of dispatching a large offensive force to punish the godless Communists. The northern army pursued MacArthur only with contrition. "Unprepared for an extended campaign in the South, [northern forces] needed a full week to regroup after taking Seoul. . . . [T]his lack of preparation for a sustained offensive cast doubt on whether the northern army had initiated the fighting," Quigley writes. The Chinese didn't want to fight either, but were suckered as part of an American master plan.

The Ruses for War does a fine job of interpreting events in the light least favorable to Washington, but rarely rebuts or even mentions opposing interpretations. That the North Korean army was busily destroying another country's cities and seizing its territory sounds rather like a venal motive on the other side. Maybe it was understandable that the Chinese didn't believe American assurances, diplomatic or military, that U.S. forces would never cross the Yalu River into China. But not only did U.S. forces not attempt to cross the Yalu before the Chinese attacked them, there is no evidence that President Truman ever authorized a crossing—a fact that, not supporting Quigley's master plan theory, is not analyzed.

Quigley's instinct for his book topic is a sound one, for a scorecard of American intervention since World War II is not a pleasant thing to behold. The United States has bombed, invaded, used force in, or underwritten wars in Angola, Cambodia, the Congo, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Korea, Kuwait, Laos, Lebanon, Libya, Panama, the Philippines, and Vietnam. During the same period the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, and underwrote wars in Angola, Ethiopia, and Vietnam. Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe gives the old USSR, overall, the less attractive record, but it is an unhappily close comparison.

And Quigley is right to be angry about the occasions on which American idealism has been shunted

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**The Ruses for War: American Interventionism Since World War II.* John Quigley. *Prometheus, $25.95.*

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aside. The 1989 invasion of Panama, for instance, continues to be one of our country's dark hours. It is amazing both how little outrage the invasion engendered from the American population and the media, and that Panama has no standing whatsoever as an issue in the 1992 presidential campaign, though it is a leading item on which George Bush's record ought to be judged.

Between 400 and 2,000 civilians died in our attack on Panama: unarmed, innocent citizens of a country we like. Though the invasion was, for public relations purposes, named Operation Just Cause, Bush has never explained in a convincing way what the Cause was, and if the presidential campaign is any indication, he will never be pressured to explain. There were several cases of summary execution of Panamanians. Our side razed damaged civilian houses to prevent them from being photographed. U.S. forces dug mass graves to bury civilian casualties of the fighting around the Panamanian Defense Force headquarters building, concealing the bodies before they could be identified and counted.

U.S. forces dug mass graves. We like to think that American troops always behave in a moral fashion, as they did during the Gulf war. In Panama they did not. Yet Bush and the Pentagon shrugged this off by refusing to comment on casualty figures, and the media promptly dropped the question. The strongest chapters of *The Ruses for War* demonstrate Quigley's wrath about both Panama and the continuing silence of even Democrats about this shameful episode.

The Ruses for War falters badly, however, when it attempts to depict the sort of dishonorable behavior of the Panama invasion as a ubiquitous theme in American military action. Quigley is angry not just about Panama and Guatemala, but about Bush's sending fighters to buzz Manila in support of Corazon Aquino, an action that harmed no one and kept a popularly elected leader in power against a military coup. He even finds outrage in the posting of Marines off Liberia during the rebellion against Samuel Doe, though the Marines were there only to help Americans escape, and ended up remaining aboard ship.

Quigley is at his worst when analyzing the Gulf war. Saddam, he says, had "specific grievances" against Kuwait. Saddam was merely trying to redress these grievances; the United Nations should have allowed him to resolve them in his own colorful way. Saddam's buildup of forces on the border to Saudi Arabia was an innocent military training exercise unrelated to any craven thoughts. And lest we forget, Saddam was revered in the Gulf as "the first Arab leader in a generation to stand up to the humiliation represented by continuing U.S. support for Israel." Somehow this makes his attack on Kuwait okey-dokey.

Quigley has not a single negative comment to offer about Saddam's human rights record, his dictatorship at home, or his atrocities against Kuwaiti, Kurdish, and Shiite civilians. Quigley notes that Kuwait was created by the British at the end of the Ottoman days and might very well be a natural province of Iraq; so why should its right-wing royalist dictators have international protection? But Quigley does not mention that Saddam's objective was to replace Kuwait's royalist elite with his own, even worse form of dictatorship.

To slant his case further, Quigley discards the international aspects of the Gulf war. On January 16, 1991, "the [Bush] administration launched a blistering aerial attack against Iraq." Five weeks later, "President Bush launched a ground assault on Iraqi forces." What about the British, the French, the Italians, the Pakistanis, and everybody else who sent aircraft and soldiers to the Gulf? What about the U.N. authorizations for use of force? In *The Ruses for War*, action against Saddam was strictly an American vendetta.

Credibility Gulf

In the end, after depicting American use of force as invariably corrupt and in service of secret ends, Quigley offers no explanation of the purpose of the conspiracy. In his closest approximation of an explanation, Quigley writes, "The United States has fashioned a set of interests for itself around the globe, largely stemming from commercial activity. Our companies are everywhere, buying and selling, making investments, digging mines, cultivating cash crops, and setting up assembly lines that employ cheap labor." This is the standard leftist explanation for American misbehavior, and because cases like Guatemala show that it contains an element of truth, the notion cannot be dismissed easily. But what commercial purpose was served by the bombing of Libya? What business interest did we have in Grenada? If corporate plutocrats are inherently sinister, why did their puppet Bush support the democrat Aquino over the military that sought to replace her?

A better hypothesis is that the military policies of a flawed but generally idealistic country like the United States are driven by a variety of forces, some admirable, some less than admirable. A book that gives equal weight to the good and bad of American motives would, ultimately, make a stronger case against the bad than a one-sided work like *The Ruses for War*. □

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Mr. Green Genes

E. O. Wilson thinks it's okay to mess with Mother Nature

by Joel Achenbach

Some of my best friends are humans. They are the damnedest, most contradictory creatures you ever saw—big-brained but unwise, resourceful but self-destructive, kind-hearted but slightly homicidal. Figure this: Throughout the history of planet Earth there have been many kinds of plants and animals that have dramatically altered the environment around them, but it has taken a species that's extraordinarily intelligent, reflective, emotionally complex, and technologically adept to screw up the situation so badly that there are doubts about the future of life itself.

The biological history of the Earth is marked by five major extinction spasms, the official names of which you no doubt have memorized as you would the names of your brothers and cousins: the Ordovician, the Devonian, the Permian, the Triassic, and the Cretaceous.

We are living in the sixth extinction spasm. And we are the spasm-inducers. That, at least, is the central thesis of Harvard biologist E. O. Wilson's scary, enlightening, delicious new book*, a treatise on the importance of "biodiversity." Wilson argues that the planet is in the midst of the greatest extinction spasm since the last of the dinosaurs disappeared about 66 million years ago. The dinosaurs were probably doomed by the climatic aftereffects of an asteroid impact; today it is the human race that has slammed into the planet with a lethal force, appropriating or altering 90 percent of the earth's land environment. At the end of Wilson's opening chapter, he asks a chilling question: "How much force does it take to break the crucible of life?"

The good news is that the Earth has recovered from these extinction spasms before. Life, post-cataclysm, tends to diversify anew. The bad news is that it takes at least 10 million years.

Yet don't mistake Wilson's book as another screed on how mankind is ruining the planet. Some of the greener environmentalists will see red when they read the fine print of his book. One of the reasons Wilson wants to maintain the earth's dizzyingly rich crowd of plants and animals is that it is profitable to keep all that nature around. To him, biodiversity is a resource for economic exploitation—nature, after all, has spent millions of years synthesizing chemicals that give plants and animals immunity against predators and disease. He goes so far as to say that some habitats can be destroyed if they are judged without significant value. (But who will tell the alligators?) Rather than lament the existence of the logging industry, he argues in favor of "strip logging," which limits soil erosion and allows natural regeneration of forests.

Tough stuff. But Wilson is used to being ideologically unfashionable. In fact, he's best known as the originator of "sociobiology," the controversial theory that certain social behaviors, whether they be of insects or of humans, are rooted in biological drives and shaped by natural selection. (You know: Men watch ESPN because a million years ago it was the man's job to figure out which of the wildebeests was the slowest.) In the mid-seventies, sociobiology flew in the face of the orthodoxy within the academy, which had rejected all notion of "human nature" and embraced an almost exclusively environmental view of human behavior. Wilson was practically called a Nazi by many of his peers (some of his Harvard colleagues formed a committee to attack sociobiology, and students were known to interrupt him in mid-lecture to accuse him of racism), but Wilson marched on, winning the Pulitzer Prize for his 1979 book *On Human Nature* (from the title, you can tell he was giving his critics the finger). He won his second

**The Diversity of Life.* Edward O. Wilson. *Harvard, $29.95.*

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Pulitzer a couple of years ago for the coffee table book, *The Ants*.

Today, Wilson has moved on to the somewhat more politically correct turf of biodiversity, although some will certainly dispute his thesis, or even the basic scientific assumptions that underlie it, such as the notion that species are the fundamental units by which the biological world should be measured. (Wilson spends much time defending the species concept.) But no one can challenge Wilson's credentials; he is one of the premier biologists on the planet (an entomologist, to be precise), not to mention an eloquent writer who is not afraid to digress into his personal philosophy or toss off an anecdote about wandering through some distant jungle.

Animal house

Mercifully, Wilson has written this book for everyone, including those of us whose knowledge of biology is limited to the idea that everything on earth is divided into the categories of Animal, Vegetable and Mineral. So Wilson takes things fairly slowly; he walks us through the general rules and theories. (For the record, there are actually five kingdoms of life, according to one current scheme: plants, fungi, animals, protozoans, and bacteria. Though it does seem awfully unfair that protozoans and bacteria get to be part of entirely separate biological kingdoms given that I'm lumped into the same one as Pat Buchanan.)

By Wilson's best guess, if all the species on the planet could be identified, they would number about 100 million. Biodiversity is even greater than that, of course, because there is the diversity within species, an almost infinite number of ways that genes can arrange themselves. A few months ago, faced with an impending deadline for one of my columns, I called Wilson and asked him why we needed so many species. Why, I asked, couldn't we just settle for some pigs, cows, chickens, and other useful critters? Why do we need so many kinds of trees when pines and oaks ought to be good enough? Why can't the planet survive as a kind of farm?

Some scientists would have been silent for a moment and then said, "Uh, who is this calling again?" Wilson didn't flinch. He explained—as he does more fully in this book—that complex ecosystems are much more stable than simple ecosystems. In the Arctic, where there are not many species, there are constant population explosions (lemmings, for example); in the tropics, where there are thousands of species of plants and animals in and around a single tree, the environment is far more stable. Remove a single "keystone" species from an ecosystem and it could be radically changed. If you eliminate the few cougars and pumas from a certain ecosystem you will see an explosion of small mammals, who then will eat all the seeds of various trees, which then won't be able to reproduce, and soon an entire forest will be in upheaval. There's no way to be sure which species is the "keystone." Sure, said Wilson, it's theoretically possible to turn the planet into a much simpler ecosystem, to just have pigs and chickens and whatnot, but it would be almost impossible to keep things under control, to manage it. Let down your guard, and suddenly you'd be knee-deep in pig poop.

Wilson's book is at times so simple, so basic, that you can imagine it being read by junior high students—no insult intended. He patiently tells the story of how humans evolved. He talks about how zookeepers can mate a tiger with a lion and get a little baby tigon (or is it a liger?). He explains things we take for granted, such as: Why are there so many species in the tropics? (Answer: The Energy-Stability-Area Theory of Biodiversity. Sorry to have ruined the suspense.)

The book is also loaded with fun facts. Like: There are probably still some species of deep sea sharks yet to be discovered. I don't think that's necessarily good news, but it's interesting. And it was news to me that the sky is full of "aeolian plankton," which is why those volcanic islands that are totally scorched and sterilized by an eruption don't remain barren for long. Tiny spiders, fungus spores, seeds, and bacteria literally rain from the heavens all over the planet. The "plankton" that isn't lucky enough to drift down on the volcanic soil will land in the ocean and die—which just goes to show that for most species, life isn't just a struggle, it's a gamble. It's like trying to shoot-the-moon in a game of hearts. (And by the way, if you go to one of those newly reforested volcanic islands and suddenly discover a 25-foot reticulated python wrapping itself around your neck, don't be confused: It did not rain from the sky like the spiders. Those bad boys can swim for miles and miles across the open sea.)

At no time, though, does Wilson seem like a scientist straining to communicate with a lay audience; the reason most scientific writing is impenetrable or detail-heavy is that it's difficult to master the information well enough to make clear communication possible. Wilson seems to understand that the simplest questions—like, why are there so many species?—are neither childish nor particularly easy to answer.

Nor is there a hint in this book of the anti-modernism of Wendell Berry or the New Age spiritualism of the Gaia crowd. Wilson sounds like your basic Al

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Gore ecologist, grounding his appeal for the preservation of biodiversity on economic and scientific reasons. He does not completely ignore the aesthetic and moral components of the crisis. "Signals abound that the loss of life's diversity endangers not just the body but the spirit," he writes.

Nevertheless, Wilson thinks biodiversity can be preserved even as standards of living are improved for the people who live in the developing world, where many of the most valued and endangered ecosystems exist. Though only 6 percent of the world's land mass, the tropical rain forests may contain half the species of organisms on the planet. Wilson writes:

> The rural poor of the Third World are locked onto a downward spiral of poverty and the destruction of diversity. Lacking access to markets, hammered by exploding populations, they turn increasingly to the last of the wild biological resources. They hunt out the animals within walking distance, cut forests that cannot be regrown, put their herds on any land from which they cannot be driven by force. They use domestic crops ill-suited to their environment, for too many years, because they know no alternative. . . . Using an accountant's trick, they record the sale of forests and other irreplaceable natural resources as national income without computing the permanent environmental losses as expenses.

So the issue, says Wilson, is this: "How can people in developing countries achieve a decent living from the land without destroying it?" The cynical reader is tempted to answer: They can't. Nor can the affluent northern hemisphere continue to chew through the world's resources with so ravenous an appetite. The idea of "sustainable development" might be appealing to those who reside in the nexus of environmentalism and progressive capitalism, and it's almost certainly the only path that the leaders of industrial nations will be willing to take. But I've never seen a convincing explanation of how 10 billion people, or 15 billion people, or whatever the ultimate population will be before it levels off, could possibly live comfortably and indefinitely on this planet with an ever-increasing standard of living.

Global warning

If there's one major disappointment in this book, it's that after Wilson delivers his devastating global forecast, after he gets us all in a lather about the destruction of life on earth, his prescriptions for turning things around seem rather tame. He suggests, for instance, that we need more research. More studies! He thinks that it would be wise to launch a massive effort to catalogue all the species on the planet, so we would know what we're dealing with. He suggests that 25,000 scientists could devote their lifetimes to research and classification, at a rate, he estimates, of 10 species per scientist per year. Don't everyone step forward at once! ("Honey, my boss says if I work really hard on the beetles for the next three years, he'll let me switch to nematodes.")

He also says that it is time for every nation to have a population policy. It's a sensible idea, but he doesn't delve into the painful political reality: The intelligentsia of the developing world thinks this is a racist, blame-shifting attitude, the paranoid fetish of rich white guys in suburban America who can't sleep at night because of all the dark-skinned babies out there. At the Earth Summit in Rio a few months ago, there was almost no official discussion of population pressures (instead of "birth control," one official document referred to "appropriate technology dissemination"); among non-governmental activists, the tension between northern and southern environmentalists prevented any meaningful agreement on what to do about overpopulation. The final "treaty" on population never even hinted that there might be too many people on the planet. (What did it actually say? I read it several times, and the only thing I learned is that free trade is bad. If you want clear writing, don't get a bunch of contentious people together and ask them to reach a consensus.)

Maybe it's wise that Wilson chose not to attend the Earth Summit. I spent a week there and hardly ever saw an actual book. Books represent too deep a well of thought; the Earth Summit was an event designed for the position paper, the press conference, the seminar, the discussion in the circle. (There was so much talk that after a while I began to pray that Greenpeace would take the Rainbow Warrior II and just start *ramming*.)

It is perhaps cowardly and unconstructive to react to the environmental crisis with mere despair, but it is not an irrational position. Cassandra was right, after all. These may not be the last days, but you can build a strong argument that the penultimate days are upon us. I choose to be an optimist, out of faith in human adaptability and my general suspicion that, despite all appearances, "progress" still describes the general direction of human history—but there's no denying that we are already living in an age of environmental catastrophe.

Wilson's book makes all this agonizingly clear. It is a siren call, a warning for the lay public. The future we had feared has become the present. □

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POLITICAL BOOKNOTES

Life Sentences: Rage and Survival Behind Bars. Wilbert Rideau, Ron Wikberg. *Times, $15*. Earlier this summer, I lived in the Tutwiler Women's Prison in Alabama, not for murder or drug possession, but for an assignment for "Nightline." I was there for only 11 days. But I will never forget what it's like to be a prisoner—disconnected from the outside world, without control over my surroundings or contact with the people I care about.

America now incarcerates more of its population than any other country in the world: 1 in 25 men and 1 in 173 women. But the inmates that we hear about are usually the few high-profile cases, the next to be executed, the celebrities. What are "average" prisoners going through? What is it like to live behind bars? My experience was, of course, limited. But still I found myself on an emotional roller-coaster ride that threw my preconceptions up in the air.

Reading *Life Sentences*, a collection of articles published from behind prison walls over a 13-year period, has roughly the same effect. The clear, powerful prose in these 24 articles—mostly written, not by "experts" or free-world journalists or movie directors, but by one former and one current inmate in the Angola State Penitentiary in Louisiana—will give anyone without a rap sheet as vivid an experience of prison life as he's ever likely to have. Rideau, an eighth-grade dropout who taught himself to write on death row and is now serving his 31st year of a life sentence, is editor-in-chief of the prison's award-winning magazine, *The Angolite*. Wikberg, his coauthor, was paroled last June after serving 23 years for murder.

The book provides several sensitive profiles of life behind bars. In "Conversations with the Dead," Rideau introduces us to "lifers" like Earl Goines, who, after 30 years, is "still a prisoner and, once planted in prison soil, forever a prisoner," and Frank "Cocky" Moore, the inmate with the oldest active prison number in the state. These men have been locked up so long that they no longer have family or friends, nor anyone, for that matter, to represent them in the outside world. No mechanism is set up for their cases to be reviewed. Unless an inmate possesses the wherewithal and zeal necessary to pursue his freedom, the system simply forgets him. Profiler Rideau describes Moore's pain—and his own—acutely:

> We cut the interview short. I had to get away. Sitting in that little shanty—the old man's world—stirred the painfully chained need for some normalcy in my life: the need to ride a bike, take a swim, watch children playing; the need to hold a woman, to talk to normal people. . . . I knew I was looking at the face of a far more obscene and ominous kind of death than the physical—a living death. The face of tomorrow? My insides shuddered, my teeth clenched, as a quiet desperation began stealing through my veins. *No . . . not like this . . . never. . . .*

In my case, it didn't take the 33 years served by Moore to feel forgotten; it took all of two days, and it started with what seemed at first to be minor inconveniences. Twice I tried to make my daily call-in to "Nightline," and twice an automated voice came

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back saying my collect calls were not accepted. Only after losing my phone link to the rest of the world did I realize how much I depended on it. Just retrieving messages on my own answering machine—now out of the question—had always been a way to keep a mental tab on who was thinking about me.

Losing touch with the people in your life, giving up the clothes that define your personality, being warehoused in overcrowded double-bunk rooms, sticking to a jarring schedule (beginning at 3:30 every morning)—it all seems to be part of a constant barrage of conditions sucking away your individuality from the moment you walk in the gate.

Life Sentences could have made prison more palpable had the authors included more of their own emotions and experiences. They have a lot to say, however, and much of it is purposefully objective. Rideau and Wikberg have read prison records and academic studies and conducted interviews with current and past institutional employees, state officials, and outside sources. They take us through an extensive history of Angola, from its philosophical roots based on a belief in mercy and a second chance for each prisoner to multiple periods of torture and inmate despair. It's easy to believe Wikberg and Rideau when they call Angola the most dangerous prison in America.

The history is chilling. In the last 30 years of the 19th century, they tell us, an estimated 3,000 male, female, and child convicts, mostly black, died from overwork and brutality as "state slaves" leased to private enterprise. In 1951, 37 white inmates cut their Achilles tendons protesting their living and working conditions. In 1989, a federal judge declared a "state of emergency" following a rash of suicides, escapes, and murders.

That brutal history helps explain why, in one anecdote, a lifer with an exemplary 20-year record suddenly ran away from guards, almost certain to be shot before escaping. As one inmate puts it, "Louisiana has taken away all the hope and closed all the avenues of possible release. . . . That was nothing more than a kamikaze move."

Unfortunately, this book is firmer on sensibility than statistics. With so much emphasis placed on the plight of Angola's lifers, it's disconcerting to read at least four different figures for their number, ranging from 715 in the state (cited in a 1978 piece) to 2,260 (1991). With all the effort the authors have put into amassing concrete data, it seems a shame not to update the information within the text (not just in chapter postscripts), especially when the latest figures support the points so dramatically. In a 1981 piece, for example, "the Soviet Union" is corrected to read "the [former] Soviet Union," but the next sentence reads, "The U.S. prison population has risen 42 percent since January 1, 1975." Actually, since the original publication of this article in 1981, the number of incarcerated has grown a whopping 149 percent.

The crowds only deepen a prisoner's despair, as I learned when searching for a private place to record the day's impressions onto my videocamera. After spending an hour and a half looking for a corner of a dorm or a hallway with some semblance of privacy, I gave up and sat on a toilet holding the camera. But people still moved in and out. Flushing wiped out my audio track. And with no separate stalls for the toilets, I couldn't bring myself to further invade the privacy of these women.

It was tempting to give up taping altogether. By the first weekend, when I found myself actually jealous of the women who received visitors (second in importance only to getting mail), all I wanted to do was lie in bed and feel sorry for myself—even though I *knew* I was getting out the following week.

One inmate finally told me, "You don't act very much like a reporter." And she was right: Being a reporter means being curious, forward, and in people's faces, which is fine in the real world. But that goes against everything it takes to survive in prison. Countless inmates and officers alike described having to change their personalities in order to survive. I quickly learned that being friendly left me vulnerable to taunts, challenges, even sexual advances.

Of course, while sex is commonplace in both men's and women's prisons, rape is a rarity among female inmates. As "Juice," a lesbian at Tutwiler, explained, "These women are not really that hard up to take [sex], because there's so many willing to give it to them. It's just like in the free world. A man will rape more than a woman. . . . If a woman rapes, she's really got a problem."

Unlike the women who engage in homosexuality for affection, the men profiled by Rideau and Wikberg treat sex as an act of power and violence, a way to affirm their manhood and individuality by "turning out," or emasculating, a victim to the point that he becomes a "galboy," a willing slave. The authors also relate how officers used to engage in trade-offs, allowing and even promoting homosexuality to keep troublemaking "studs" at peace, although they point out that this would not be allowed today.

The writers' well-balanced reporting consistently includes viewpoints of prison officials and staff, commending their efforts when due. A full chapter is devoted to C. Paul Phelps, former state secretary of corrections, who in the seventies turned what may have been the bloodiest prison in the nation into one of the safest. Another chapter focuses on the retirement of warden Ross Maggio: "He had come a long way—from the get-tough warden who would not request release for any prisoner to the single most powerful voice speaking out on prisoners' behalf."

Prison's subtle hardening effects make Rideau and Wikberg's fair and sensitive reportage especially impressive. While they possessed the advantage of internal access, the reporting was hardly easy. "In this environment," they say, "the pursuit of aggressive, realistic journalism requires the finesse of a diplomat and the courage of a soldier, assessing risks, then taking calculated gambles."

The effort was worth it. The articles published in this book have already encouraged Louisiana to replace the defective, inconsistent electric chair with lethal injection; exposed a diversion of funds intended for parole and probation operations to the state's general fund; and got names placed on every tombstone in the prison's cemetery. It would be nice to think that the words and images that changed minds within the prison system can now do the same for those outside of it.

—Deanna Lee

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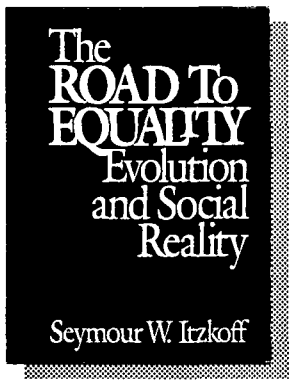

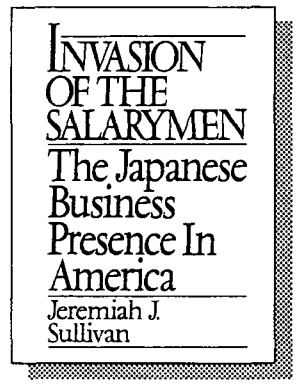

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